USES OF ETHICAL THEORIES

DEFINITION:

Ethical theories help a person to arrive at a decision. Ethical theories help us to choose what is appropriate for the given situation. Ethical theories also give us a perspective on morality. Ethical theories assist us in making reasonable choices.

use of ethical theory

Ethical theories study human moral behavior and attempt to discover normative rules or maxims that describe what can be called "right action" and "wrong action." Theories of ethics can be deontological systems, which are built around absolute moral rules that must be followed regardless of the outcome.

Ethics is that branch of philosophy that deals with morality. An engineer with ethics is a person who is expected to possess the moral integrity with rich ethical values. The ethics are mainly divided into two categories depending upon the morality of humanity. They are –

Consequential Ethics

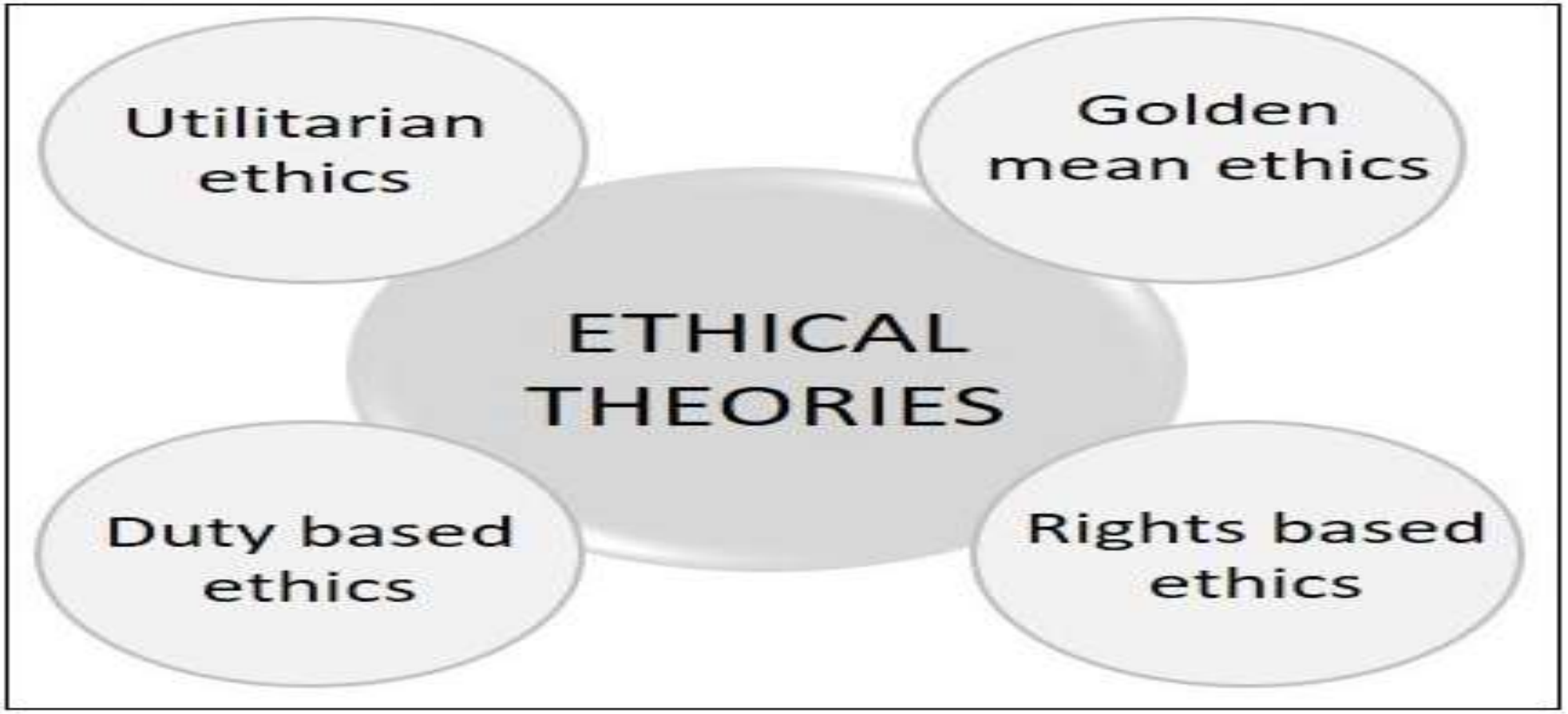
The Consequential ethics are values the outcome of which determine the morality behind a particular action. A lie which saves a life, comes under this.

Non-consequential Ethics

The non-consequential ethics are values followed where the source of morality comes from the standard values. The moral law which states that a lie is a lie, and shouldn't be done, though it ends in a good deed can be taken as an example of non-consequential ethics.

Types of Ethical Theories

Depending upon the ethics a person is intended to follow, four theories were postulated by four different philosophers. These theories help to create the fundamentals of obligation suitable and applicable to professional and personal conduct of a person in his everyday life.


Utilitarian ethics
Golden mean ethics
ETHICAL THEORIES
Duty based ethics
Rights based ethics

Formulation of Ethical Theories

After having gone through the various ethical theories, one can understand that these ethical theories have to be formulated considering the following points –

- The concepts of the theory formulated must be coherent.
- The tenets of the theory should never contradict the other.
- The theory should never be defended upon false information.
- The theory should guide in specific situations comprehending all aspects possible.
- The theory should be compatible with individual's moral convictions in any situation.

Uses of Ethical Theories

Ethical theories help in the following areas –

- Understanding moral dilemmas.
- Justifying professional obligations and ideas.
- Relating ordinary and professional morality.

Case Study: Autonomous Vehicles and Ethical Decision-Making

Scenario:

- A major car manufacturer is developing an autonomous vehicle with advanced artificial intelligence designed to navigate and make decisions in complex driving environments. During testing, a situation arises where the vehicle must make a split-second decision: it can either swerve to avoid a pedestrian who suddenly steps into the road but risks crashing into a wall, or it can continue straight and risk hitting the pedestrian. The ethical dilemma is determining how the vehicle's AI should prioritize different values in such situations.

- **Applying Ethical Theories:**
- **Utilitarianism:**
- **Principle:** The right action is the one that maximizes overall happiness or well-being.
- **Application:** A utilitarian approach would analyze the potential outcomes of each decision in terms of overall consequences. If swerving avoids the pedestrian but results in severe injury to the passengers, the decision might be justified if it results in a higher overall well-being (fewer people harmed overall). The vehicle's AI would need to calculate which action would result in the least harm and greatest benefit for the greatest number of people.

- **2.Deontological Ethics:**
- **Principle:** Actions are morally right if they adhere to a set of rules or duties, regardless of the consequences.
- **Application:** From a deontological perspective, the focus would be on duties and rights. For instance, the vehicle might be programmed to prioritize the safety of human lives based on a rule that values the protection of pedestrians as a primary duty. The decision might be influenced by the principle of respecting human life, making it the duty of the AI to avoid harm to the pedestrian even if it results in a higher risk to passengers.

- **3.Virtue Ethics:**
- **Principle:** Moral behavior is based on the virtues or character traits that a good person would exhibit.
- **Application:** Virtue ethics would consider what a virtuous agent would do in this situation, emphasizing traits like compassion, courage, and wisdom. The AI could be programmed to make decisions reflecting these virtues, potentially prioritizing actions that align with a compassionate approach to preserving life while balancing courage to face potential harm. This could mean creating a decision-making framework that aligns with the values of a society that values both safety and moral character.

- **4.Social Contract Theory:**
- **Principle:** Morality is based on the agreements or contracts that individuals make with each other within a society.
- **Application:** Social contract theory would focus on the implicit agreements within society about acceptable behavior. The AI might be programmed based on societal norms and legal standards, considering what the public would reasonably agree to as fair. This might involve creating a system that reflects the collective values and legal expectations regarding pedestrian and passenger safety.
- of a society that values both safety and moral character.

- **5.Ethical Relativism:**
- **Principle:** Moral standards are not absolute but are relative to cultural or individual preferences.
- **Application:** Ethical relativism would suggest that the decision should reflect the cultural or societal values of the region where the vehicle is operating. If different cultures have different norms about how to handle such situations, the vehicle's AI could be programmed to adapt its decision-making process based on local ethical standards and preferences.

- **Conclusion:**
- The ethical decision-making process for autonomous vehicles involves a complex interplay of various ethical theories. Each framework provides a different perspective on how to handle the dilemma, highlighting the importance of integrating multiple ethical considerations into the design and programming of autonomous systems. Balancing these theories can help in creating more ethical and acceptable AI systems that align with societal values and expectations.