Sources of Value in Ethical Decisions

by John Lumsden

☰	WHAT'S COVERED

In this tutorial we will look at the three main groups of ethical positions and see how they can work together to evaluate actions. Our discussion will break down like this:

1. Review of Ethical Positions

To begin with, let's remind ourselves of the three broad ethical positions that can group various ethical theories. Take note of the different things each position finds relevant for ethical evaluation.

Ethical Positions	
Consequentialism	The position that consequences are the basis for ethical valuation.
Deontology	The position that something intrinsic to the action itself is the basis for ethical valuation.
Character Ethics	The position that the character trait being manifested in the action is the basis for ethical valuation.

Although these positions are usually contrasted with each other, they can be used together. In other words, you can take an action and evaluate it from all of these perspectives.

Not only can you use different positions to evaluate actions; you can also use these positions when deciding what to do yourself. For instance, you could *intend* to act in a way that respects peoples' rights and aim to bring about the best *outcome*. You could do all this whilst also showing *virtuous character*. In the next section we will look at various examples to clarify how an action can be informed by different values.

2. Different Sources of Value

First of all, let's consider the action of going into further education. The different ethical positions will usually all say that this is a good action, but their judgments are based on different values.

Action: Going Into Further Education	
Consequentialism	This is good because learning can improve people's lives in various ways. Thus it's good because the outcome is desirable.
	If the intention is to develop rational capacities, then it's good because the intention

Deontology	respects and furthers humanity.
Character Ethics	This action could manifest many different virtues, such as self-discipline or ambition. If the action is motivated by these character traits, then it is good.

Now consider the action of using a fake disabled badge in order to use more convenient parking.

Action: Using a Fake Disabled Badge	
Consequentialism	This is bad because the benefits of convenience is outweighed by the deprivation of a parking space for a genuinely disabled person.
Deontology	This is bad because it's based on an immoral intention to violate a genuinely disabled person's rights.
Character Ethics	This action could manifest many vices, such as being selfish or inconsiderate. This action is also bad because it could encourage these vices.

Finally, consider the action of habitually overeating.

Action: Overeating	
Consequentialism	If the pleasure of eating is outweighed by the potential health dangers, then it's bad because the consequences are bad.
Deontology	The intention is immoral because you would be using your humanity as a mere means for pleasure.
Character Ethics	This action could manifest many vices, such as overindulgence or lack of self-control. This action is also bad because it could encourage these vices.

☑ SUMMARY

We started this tutorial with a **review of ethical positions**, focusing on the different things that these positions find relevant when making ethical evaluations. Then we saw how each of these positions could be used together to give compatible evaluations of the same action using **different sources of value**.