

# Approaching Ethics

## The Virtue Approach

- Focuses on attitudes, dispositions, or character traits that enable us to be and to act in ways that develop our human potential.
- Examples: honesty, courage, faithfulness, trustworthiness, integrity, etc.
- The principle states: "What is ethical is what develops moral virtues in ourselves and our communities."

## The Utilitarian Approach

- Focuses on the consequences that actions or policies have on the well-being ("utility") of all persons directly or indirectly affected by the action or policy.
- The principle states: "Of any two actions, the most ethical one will produce the greatest balance of benefits over harms."

## The Rights Approach

- Identifies certain interests or activities that our behavior must respect, especially those areas of our lives that are of such value to us that they merit protection from others.
- Each person has a fundamental right to be respected and treated as a free and equal rational person capable of making his or her own decisions.
- This implies other rights (e.g., privacy free consent, freedom of conscience, etc.) that must be protected if a person is to have the freedom to direct his or her own life.
- The principle states: "An action or policy is morally right only if those persons affected by the decision are not used merely as instruments for advancing some goal, but are fully informed and treated only as they have freely and knowingly consented to be treated."

## The Fairness (or Justice) Approach

- Focuses on how fairly or unfairly our actions distribute benefits and burdens among the members of a group.
- Fairness requires consistency in the way people are treated.
- The principle states: "Treat people the same unless there are morally relevant differences between them."

## The Common Good Approach

- Presents a vision of society as a community whose members are joined in a shared pursuit of values and goals they hold in common.
- The community is comprised of individuals whose own good is inextricably bound to the good of the whole.
- The principle states: "What is ethical is what advances the common good."