

Investigating an ethical issue

What is the ethical issue?

Ethical approach: Consequentialism

Consequentialism is to do with the consequences of actions. Using this ethical approach, we weigh the benefits and harms resulting from our actions.

1. Who/what is affected by this issue?

2. What are the possible benefits for those affected?

3. What are the possible harms for those affected?

4. Which option(s) will produce the most good and least harm?

5. If one is harmed and another benefits, how do you decide who or what matters most?

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Ethical approach: Rights and responsibilities

Rights and responsibilities are closely related: the rights of one imply the responsibilities (or duties) of another to ensure those rights.

1. Who/what is affected by this issue?

2. Which groups have rights associated with this issue? What are their rights?

3. Do these same groups also have responsibilities? What are their responsibilities?

4. Do we value some rights more than others? Whose rights do we want to protect?

5. Do any codes, declarations and/or conventions relate to this issue?

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Ethical approach: Autonomy

Autonomy recognises the right to choose for yourself.

1. Who/what is affected by this issue?

2. What effects might my choice have on others?

3. What effects might others' choices have on me?

4. Does everyone have to do the same thing? Will this cause problems?

5. What is informed consent? Is it important here?

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Ethical approach: Virtue ethics

A virtue is something that the community accepts as being 'good', such as honesty, kindness and patience. Virtue ethics emphasise decisions that are in line with these characteristics.

1. Who/what is affected by this issue?

2. What qualities make someone a 'good' or virtuous person?

3. What decisions/actions in relation to this issue would make you a 'good' person?

4. What people would agree that these decisions/actions are 'good'?

5. What people would disagree that these decisions/actions are 'good'?

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Ethical approach: Multiple perspectives

Ethical decisions are viewed differently by different people. When considering an issue, it is important to explore a range of world views and respect diversity, for example, cultural, socioeconomic and spiritual or religious diversity.

1. Which groups have opinions about this issue? What are their opinions?

2. Why do groups of people think this way? Have they always thought this way?

3. Which groups voice opinions about this issue? (Not all groups that have an opinion voice them in a public forum.)

4. Do the opinions of all groups have equal weighting? How do you decide?

5. Can all the groups agree, and do they need to?