



Deontological VS Teleological Ethics In Modern Pastoral Counseling Practice

Apriani Delfita Legrans¹, Marchella Winda Sirang², Maygresye Natalia Sambouw³,
Ivane Dear Suryani Brek⁴

¹⁻³Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Manado

⁴Universitas Tarumanagara

Author Correspondence : yithalegrans@gmail.com*

Abstract. *This article discusses two main ethical approaches, namely deontological and teleological in the context of modern pastoral counseling practice. Through conceptual and comparative analysis, this article explores how these two approaches are applied in the moral decisions faced by pastoral counselors when accompanying congregations. This study aims to provide in-depth understanding for pastoral counselors to be able to make ethical decisions that are not only in accordance with moral principles, but also pastorally relevant*

Keywords *deontological ethics, teleological ethics, pastoral counseling, morality, pastoral theology*

1. INTRODUCTION

In pastoral counseling practice, ethical issues become an integral part of the decision-making process, especially when counselors are faced with complex moral dilemmas. Along with the development of social and cultural challenges in modern society, pastoral counselors are required to have an ethical framework that is not only normative, but also able to answer pastoral realities contextually. The two main approaches that are often used as references in ethical decision-making are the deontological and teleological approaches. The deontological approach emphasizes the importance of moral principles and universal obligations that must be obeyed, while the teleological approach focuses on the consequences of actions and pursuing the best outcomes for the greatest number of people. Both approaches have significant implications for pastoral counseling practice, particularly in determining the direction of guidance that is consistent with Christian faith values and the contextual needs of clients. The purpose of this article is to critically analyze the application of deontological and teleological ethics in modern pastoral counseling practice, and to evaluate the advantages and limitations of each approach. Thus, this article is expected to contribute to the development of an integrative and relevant ethical framework for contemporary pastoral care.

Theoretical Basis

Deontological Ethics

Deontological ethics comes from the Greek word "deon" which means duty. This approach

emphasizes the importance of moral actions based on absolute obligations or rules, regardless of the results or consequences. The main figure in this approach is Immanuel Kant who developed the principle of the categorical imperative, namely that a person must act according to principles that can be used as universal law (Kant, 1785). In the context of pastoral counseling, the deontological approach requires counselors to act in accordance with ethical principles derived from the Bible and church teachings, without compromising these values, even though such actions may not produce pleasant consequences for the client.

Teleological Ethics

On the other hand, teleological ethics comes from the word "telos" which means goal or end. This approach assesses the good and bad of actions based on the results or consequences they cause. The most well-known approach to teleological ethics is utilitarianism developed by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. The main principle of this approach is "the greatest good for the greatest number" (Mill, 1863). In pastoral counseling practice, this approach is used when the counselor considers the impact of his or her actions on the client's emotional, spiritual, and social well-being, even if it means compromising certain principles for the sake of better outcomes.

Pastoral Ethics in the Perspective of Christian Theology

Pastoral ethics cannot be separated from the foundation of Christian theology which is rooted in love, justice, and wisdom. The Word of God in Micah 6:8 emphasizes that what God requires of humans is to act justly, love mercy, and live humbly before God. Romans 12:2 also emphasizes the importance of renewing the mind to be able to discern the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God. Pastoral literature in Indonesia, as stated by Gultom (2017), emphasizes that pastoral ethics must combine firm moral principles with contextual sensitivity, so that counseling services are not legalistic, but also do not fall into moral relativism.

2. METHODS

This article uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method to analyze and compare the application of deontological and teleological ethics in pastoral counseling practices. Data were collected from ethics books, pastoral literature, church documents, and relevant biblical sources. The analysis was carried out with a reflective-critical approach to cases that often arise in contemporary pastoral ministry. In pastoral counseling, an ethical approach plays an important role in maintaining the integrity of the service and responsibly responding to the various moral dilemmas faced by counselors and clients. The two main

approaches to ethics—deontological and teleological—offer different frameworks, but both remain relevant in assisting individuals holistically. Therefore, in the context of pastoral counseling, it is important to understand how these two ethical approaches can complement each other.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Relationship between Deontological Ethics and Teleological Ethics

1. Deontological Ethics in Pastoral Counseling

Deontological ethics in pastoral ministry emphasizes moral obligations, divine responsibility, and fixed principles derived from the teachings of faith. Pastoral counselors who adhere to this approach will prioritize faithfulness to God's Word, church values, and personal integrity. For example, a counselor should not justify lying in the counseling process, even if it is intended to avoid conflict, because honesty is a moral commandment that cannot be compromised.

2. Teleological Ethics in Pastoral Counseling

In contrast, teleological ethics encourages counselors to assess the end result of an action. In this approach, counseling actions are considered right to the extent that they bring well-being, recovery, and growth to the client. Counselors may consider flexible approaches in conveying information or mentoring strategies for better psychological and spiritual outcomes.

3. Tension and Integration Efforts in Pastoral Counseling

In practice, pastoral counselors are often in tension between adherence to principles (deontological) and sensitivity to results (teleological). In this context, reflective and situational ethics become alternatives that integrate normative and contextual aspects. According to Pieter G. Brouwer, the pastoral ethics approach should not be trapped in legalism (law without love), but it should also not fall into relativism (love without law).

4. Synthesis Model in Practice

Many pastoral practitioners and ethical theologians try to build a synthesis model between these two approaches, for example: Ethics of love (agape) as the highest moral basis, where love becomes the interpreter of both norms and results; Dietrich Bonhoeffer's responsible ethics, and the integrative approach in the book *Pastoral Ethics* by A.A. Yewangoe.

Practical Implications in Pastoral Counseling

Counselors must have a strong moral foundation (deontological principles), but remain

flexible and adaptive to the client's situation (teleological). Pastoral decisions must be based on responsible love, not just on compliance with rules or the search for effective results. Counselors should develop contextual ethical reflection, taking into account faith values, the client's psychological needs, and long-term pastoral impacts. Deontological and teleological ethics are not mutually exclusive approaches in pastoral counseling. In fact, in the complex world of ministry, both approaches can be complementary, one affirming principles, the other emphasizing practical wisdom. The synthesis of both is important so that counselors can carry out their duties responsibly, lovingly, and faithfully to the truth of faith.

Comparison of Deontological and Teleological in Counseling Practice

Case 1: Counseling a victim of domestic violence.

In the deontological approach, the pastoral counselor has a moral obligation to protect the dignity and safety of the victim. Actions such as encouraging the victim to report to the authorities or leaving a dangerous environment are considered obligations that cannot be compromised. Meanwhile, the teleological approach will consider the impact of these actions on the family as a whole, including the possibility of child trauma or a larger relationship breakdown.

Case 2: Counseling LGBTQ youth in a conservative church context.

A deontological approach directs counselors to adhere to conservative theological understandings of sexuality, focusing on upholding biblical norms. In contrast, a teleological approach is more open to considering more inclusive and supportive approaches, with the hope that clients feel accepted and motivated to grow in their faith without feeling rejected.

Deontological ethics provides moral clarity and integrity of principles, but risks becoming rigid and insensitive to context. Teleological ethics, on the other hand, offers flexibility and contextual responsiveness, but can lead to moral relativism if not balanced with clear principles. Therefore, in pastoral counseling practice, a wise integration of the two approaches is essential.

The Relationship between Deontological and Teleological Ethics in Modern Pastoral Counseling Practice

Deontological and teleological ethics are often considered as two opposing poles of moral approaches. Deontological ethics emphasizes right actions based on absolute moral principles and obligations, such as honesty, loyalty, and justice, regardless of the consequences of those actions. Meanwhile, teleological ethics focuses on the purpose or end result of an action, by assessing whether the action produces the greatest good for the individual or community.

However, in modern pastoral counseling practice, this dichotomy is not always absolute. Many pastoral ethicists acknowledge that an overly rigid approach to only one pole can actually create greater moral dilemmas, especially in the complex and dynamic pastoral context of real life. Therefore, the integration of moral principles (deontological) and outcome orientation (teleological) is a wiser approach.

According to Thomas Yates (2010), a mature approach to pastoral ethics is not one of choosing between principles and outcomes, but rather developing discernment that is able to assess when principles need to be firmly upheld, and when the pastoral context demands adjustment of actions for the greater good. He writes, "Pastoral ethics must bridge the gap between universal principles and sensitivity to the concrete needs of people, through reflective and relational love" (Yates, 2010). For example, in counseling couples facing a divorce due to domestic violence, deontological principles emphasize the sanctity of marriage and the prohibition of divorce. However, a teleological approach sees the potential for salvation and restoration of the client's life as the greater goal. In this context, pastoral counselors need to prioritize spiritual wisdom that allows for actions that are not only faithful to Christian values, but also protect the life and dignity of the injured person. Gultom (2017) asserts that effective pastoral ethics are ethics rooted in the principle of Christ's love that is not legalistic, but also not permissive. He calls this approach "contextual ethics of love," namely actions that consider both the moral norms of the Bible and the concrete situation of the client as a whole (Gultom, 2017). In this sense, love becomes a bridge between deontology and teleology, where principles and outcomes are not opposed, but synthesized for the good of the client and the testimony of the church.

This integrative model is also in line with the biblical principle as stated in Romans 13:10: "Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." This verse shows that love is the primary basis of all moral law, and as such, can be a benchmark for combining the principles and outcomes approaches in pastoral ethical decisions. Thus, in modern pastoral counseling, the relationship between deontological and teleological ethics is not an unbridgeable dichotomy, but a dynamic that can be integrated through spiritual discernment and reflective love. This approach allows pastoral counselors to remain rooted in the teachings of the Christian faith while being sensitive to the realities of the congregation's life.

Implications for Modern Pastoral Counseling Practice

In the increasingly complex reality of modern pastoral ministry, counselors cannot simply adhere to one ethical approach absolutely. Spiritual wisdom (discernment) is needed in combining moral principles (deontological) and consideration of results (teleological) in

order to support the client's complete spiritual recovery and growth. In addition, churches and service institutions in Indonesia need to develop a code of ethics for pastoral counseling that is contextual and responsive to the dynamics of the times.

4. CONCLUSION

Deontological and teleological ethics each have strengths and limitations in their application in the field. In modern pastoral counseling, a counselor needs to have the sensitivity to assess the situation and choose the most appropriate approach, while still adhering to the principles of Christian love and moral responsibility. Continuous training and development of pastoral ethics capacity is needed, as well as the preparation of applicable ethical guidelines at the local church level.

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