CODE FOCUS
(e.g. Immanuel Kant)

"WHAT IF EVERYONE DID THIS?"

Focuses on doing the right action (e.g. keep our promises, don't lie) without being swayed by the consequences. Takes into account the motives for action and our duty, not just results. What's right is acting in line with universal rules/codes. Only act in such a way that you could make it a rule/code for everyone to follow. Act in a way that respects the goals of others, not just use them for your own purposes.

QUESTIONS?

ASK YOURSELF:

Am I respecting others' rights and not just using them?

Would I want this action made into a rule/code for all to follow?

What if everyone did this?

What is my duty/obligation?

SAYINGS

ASSOCIATED WITH THIS FOCUS:

"It's not whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game"

"We must do our duty"

"We have our rights"

PROS +

INTENT MATTERS. Can help us focus on motives/intent. Following a code of conduct regardless of consequences.

In sports (e.g. soccer, basketball) we distinguish between a foul committed by mistake and an "intentional foul". Involuntary manslaughter (killing someone by mistake) seems less wrong than pre-meditated murder.

RIGHTS. Can help us respect others' rights (e.g. through consistent rules/codes for all) and not just use others.

There is an attack on campus that many think is racially and religiously based. Students are on the verge of rioting, but no one knows who committed the attack. You are on a board that is making decisions about the case. The Code approach can stop us from finding a scapegoat (e.g. holding a random person responsible) just to end the conflict, even if the riot could be prevented and the overall consequences would be better.

CONS −

CODE CONFLICT. No guidance when rules/codes conflict.

Two rules/codes: "Keep your promises" & "Help others when they need you". What should you do if you promised to meet a friend to help them study for a class, but on your way there you find out that another friend is going through a bad breakup and needs you during that time too?

EXCEPTIONS. Exceptions seem to exist for most if not all rules/codes… what do we do then?

Your follow the code: "never steal", but your family is starving and you believe that you need to steal some food to save their lives.

MORE THAN CODES. There seems to be more to life than codes/duty alone. What about consequences & showing good character?

Your friend visits you to help with a stressful project. You are so happy to see them. You ask why and they say: "I felt it was my duty, I follow the universal code that I should help those suffering…" They say nothing about caring for you as a friend, etc.

CONCLUSION
This is a very well respected focus that is an essential component of WeTake5.com's "5Cs" pluralistic approach to ethical decision-making.

Helpful References: Hinman, Lawrence P. (2012) *Ethics: A Pluralistic Approach to Moral Theory (5th Edition)*; Kidder, Rushworth M. (2009) *How Good People Make Tough Choices: Resolving the Ethical Dilemmas of Living (Revised Edition)*. Harper Perennial; Rachels, James and Stuart. (2006) *The Elements of Moral Philosophy (5th & 7th editions)*. McGraw-Hill