

## ***Moral Frameworks Tier List***

**OVERVIEW:** A “tier list” is a method of grading. It appears to have started in the video game community as a way to rank different players within games, or even different games themselves. As tier lists became more mainstream, people have started using them to rank pretty much anything: fast food, musicians, sports teams—the list goes on. The grading is based on the following scale: S, A, B, C, D, F (S stands for “superior” and is ranked higher than an A).

When debating ethics, we can use a tier list as a helpful visual to rank moral frameworks that might apply in a specific scenario.

As a refresher, here are 6 general frameworks that can be used to approach a moral issue:

| <b>Name of Framework</b>               | <b>Definition / Use Cases</b>                                                                                                                                                  | <b>Questions Worth Asking with This Framework</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b><i>Consequences</i></b>             | This framework for analyzing ethical dilemmas focuses on the outcomes of actions. It often focuses on the total amount of “harm” or “good” that might come from an action.     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who will be affected by this action?</li><li>• How much “harm/good” will come from this action?</li><li>• What is the best action/outcome for the majority of people affected by this?</li></ul>                                                                                                    |
| <b><i>Inner Thoughts</i></b>           | This framework for analyzing ethical dilemmas focuses on people’s “motive” or “intention” for specific actions.                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the motivation behind an action?</li><li>• What was the original intention of the action? Does that matter?</li><li>• Did someone have (or lack) knowledge when the action was done?</li><li>• How do a person’s “inner thoughts” affect the rightness or wrongness of an action?</li></ul> |
| <b><i>Foundational Ideals</i></b>      | This framework for analyzing ethical dilemmas focuses on “rights” or “ideals” (values) that connect to a specific action.                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What rights or ideals connect to this specific action?</li><li>• How do these rights / ideals connect with a specific action?</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b><i>Care &amp; Relationships</i></b> | This framework for analyzing ethical dilemmas focuses on a person’s “needs” or “relationships” that might matter in the context of a specific action.                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What relationships are at stake? Is there anything special / important about the nature of the relationship?</li><li>• Is there a priority or obligation to care for someone’s needs?</li></ul>                                                                                                     |
| <b><i>Social Agreements</i></b>        | This framework for analyzing ethical dilemmas focuses on “agreements” (both spoken and unspoken) and contracts (both written or implied) that people may have with each other. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are there any unspoken/implicit agreements that someone might think is in play in this situation?</li><li>• Are there any explicit “contracts” or binding agreements that might come into play?</li></ul>                                                                                           |
| <b><i>Virtues</i></b>                  | This framework for analyzing ethical dilemmas focuses on values, character traits, and virtues that a person might have.                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does this decision/action go against any core virtues that someone might value?</li><li>• Does this decision/action lead to the “decline” or “growth” of a specific virtue or character trait within a specific person or our society?</li></ul>                                                    |

## Example Tier List

**EXAMPLE:** Below is an example Tier List in response to the case titled “Calling Dr. Alexa” from the [National High School Ethics Bowl Case Library](#). Read over the case and compare your ranking for the moral framework to the model below. Discuss and arguments (and counterarguments) for where you and your team agree or disagree with this example.

### “Calling Dr. Alexa”

NHSEB Regional Case 2024-2025

Grace, a high school senior, has been grappling with anxiety and stress due to academic pressures and social dynamics. Seeking support, she discovers an AI-powered therapy app offering cognitive-behavioral techniques and mindfulness exercises. Attracted by its accessibility and affordability, Grace begins using the app regularly.

The rise of AI therapy platforms represents a new direction of mental health care. Proponents argue that such technology democratizes access to support, especially for those who may face barriers to traditional therapy due to cost, stigma, or scheduling. It's plausible that AI therapy apps could fill a crucial gap by providing immediate assistance to people who might otherwise go without help. Even the American Psychological Association mentions that cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) "places an emphasis on helping individuals learn to be their own therapists"<sup>1</sup>. 1

However, concerns arise about the efficacy and ethics of relying on AI for mental health. Critics point out that AI lacks the empathetic understanding of human therapists. An algorithm may not be able to replace the nuanced understanding of human connection and there's a risk of oversimplifying complex emotional issues, not to mention the potential for unhelpful (or even harmful) advice or directives.

Grace notices improvements in her mood and appreciates the convenience that AI therapy offers. The app's exercises help her manage stress, and the 24/7 availability fits her busy schedule. However, she sometimes wonders whether the responses from the app truly address her individual needs or if they're generic solutions that dilute her individual perspective. Privacy is another concern; the app collects personal data to tailor its services and she wonders about how this sensitive information is stored and used.

Model Framework Tier List for  
“Calling Dr. Alexa”

|          |                      |
|----------|----------------------|
| <b>S</b> | Care & Relationships |
| <b>A</b> | Consequences         |
| <b>B</b> | Foundational Ideals  |
| <b>C</b> | Social Agreements    |
| <b>D</b> | Virtues              |
| <b>F</b> | Inner Thoughts       |

My Framework Tier List for  
“Calling Dr. Alexa”

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| <b>S</b> |  |
| <b>A</b> |  |
| <b>B</b> |  |
| <b>C</b> |  |
| <b>D</b> |  |
| <b>F</b> |  |

<sup>1</sup> American Psychological Association. 2017. “What Is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy?” APA PTSD Guideline. <https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/patients-and-families/cognitive-behavioral>

## Team Practice: Moral Framework Tier List

**DIRECTIONS:** Use this page to create a moral framework tier list and compare your list with your peers. Follow the steps below:

1. Select and agree to read a specific case from the [NHSEB.org library](https://www.nhseeb.org/library)
2. Fill out the “Case Notes” section below as a team.
3. Rank the moral frameworks on the “Tier List” as an individual
4. Share your rankings with your team and discuss arguments (and counterarguments) for any places where your team has different rankings.

### CASE NOTES

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| CASE NAME:                     |  |
| Central Moral issue / problem: |  |
| Stakeholders to consider:      |  |

### FRAMEWORK TIER LIST

|                                                 |  |
|-------------------------------------------------|--|
| <b>S</b><br>(Strongest Framework for this case) |  |
| <b>A</b>                                        |  |
| <b>B</b>                                        |  |
| <b>C</b>                                        |  |
| <b>D</b>                                        |  |
| <b>F</b><br>(Weakest Framework for this case)   |  |