

Utilitarianism essay sample

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Where do you draw the line on what is right?

Ethical theories are something that have been tossed around between people for years. The dispute over what is right or wrong is endless and has many ways of reaching an answer. Each of these theories that arise has both its benefits and drawbacks. No one theory can be perfect and fit everyone's needs. For a theory to be successful it needs to have supporters. For it to have supporters people need to believe in it. For people to believe in it, it needs to benefit them in some way.

This paper will discuss the properties of utilitarianism and the benefits it has on society. It will also compare utilitarianism to egoism, Kantian ethics, intuitionism and affirmative action. Utilitarianism's overall purpose is to serve the greater majority and this paper sets out to prove that. This paper will discuss many major points in utilitarianism such as: it links happiness and morality, it conforms to meet the needs of different situations, requires situation outcomes to be fair, and forces us to take in ideas or not only ours but the people around us.

This paper will also discuss some of the criticisms about this theory. These criticisms include: taking too much time to reach a decision, calculations to a decision can lead to unforeseeable consequences, population size is too big to put this theory into effect and the distribution of wealth, money or other goods may not be even.

To start we should get a feel for what exactly utilitarianism is. In a simple definition it is promoting the greater good for the majority. This definition does not give the theory as a whole, justice in defining it but as you read this

paper you'll get a better understanding on just how good utilitarianism is. Before we defend this theory against other theories out there we should get a better understanding of what the utilitarianism theory all entails. First, this theory promotes the greater good for the majority. For example if someone were given the choice to save six drowning person versus one, they should pick the six over the one because the six would greater the majority. It's important in this theory to try and please more people to ensure fairness which brings me into the next point.

Utilitarianism promotes equality among people. This makes it to where before a decision can be made everyone's ideas and beliefs need to be taken into consideration. It is very clear-cut. Positive points are given to things that are happy and negative points are given to things that bring about pain or sadness. After all that is taken into consideration a decision is made based on what will promote the most positive response.

Another part of utilitarianism is that it takes emotions into decisions. A lot of theories take emotions out of decisions because they say they can "alter" the decision making process. This theory on the other hand takes happiness into account for mortality. If something causes happiness it should be good but if it causes pain than if at all possible it should be avoided. This helps in the decision process because with utilitarianism where looking out for what increases the greater good and by increasing the greater good we want to increase happiness.

Flexibility, the one thing on everybody's mind. Everyone can use a little flexibility in life. This theory offers it. Utilitarianism will conform to the

different demands with different situations. It understands that each and every situation can't be alike and will have different variables and outcomes. You can't just base it off a couple universal rules and call it good. My next area to address is why utilitarianism? With all the other theories out there why should you pick this one? This paper is going to talk about this theory versus a couple others to where you can more so understand where this theory stands in comparison to others and you can see for yourself why this one comes out on top.

First off will be Egoism. Egoism is a theory about promoting what is best for one's self. Egoism is said to be a theory in which people are greedy and self centered. People only look out for themselves and what benefits them. It doesn't take into account that it may hurt other people in the process of promoting one person. With this theory there would be utter chaos. Everyone would just be trying to get ahead of everyone else. With utilitarianism though people are working together and promoting the better welfare for everyone. Utilitarianism will help the overall society unlike egoism which will only cause harm.

Next comes Kantian ethics. Kantian ethics is how one should act. This theory focuses more on the action of doing something rather than the consequences. As long as your acting in a "moral" way then the consequences of your actions won't matter. This is not the way someone should go about living their life. If we go about life never thinking about the consequences of our actions we could be causing overall more harm than good. We may never realize our path of destruction behind us. With utilitarianism we must think about our actions in order to benefit the greater

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good. In life you must look at all aspects of a situation including consequences before an appropriate decision can be made on how to respond.

Intuitionism is the next theory. Intuitionism is a theory that all decisions are based in intuition. A person should just “ know” what is right and wrong. This theory has nothing to base its reasoning’s off of. It is said to be quick and without reasoning. In this theory you make your decisions without have to latter put reason behind it. You can almost do whatever you please as long as you can reason it within yourself. With utilitarianism you at least have a way to defend the actions you make. This theory doesn’t seem like much of a theory at all. You can’t go about life doing what you “ feel” is right. You need some sort of guidelines to live by and utilitarianism offers this along with flexibility. It’s the best of both worlds.

Finally affirmative action is the last theory this paper will address. Affirmative action is giving advantages to members of disadvantaged groups. This creates inequality within a society. Disadvantaged groups would include minorities such as people of different race then Caucasian, woman and people with different religious background besides Christianity. These groups are given a boost in life to “ even” things out. This doesn’t solve any problems within a society all it does is cause more problems. Some people are getting things they don’t deserve while others are being pushed aside for things they do deserve. An example of this would be colleges. Some colleges would have it where they would have a number of students that would be accepted into the college that year and so many of them had to be from various disadvantaged groups.

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This would give a boost to students who normally wouldn't have been accepted, they would now be so the school could meet that quota. On the other hand students not part of disadvantaged groups who deserved a spot in the college would get denied because spots would be full. This created an inequality in society. Utilitarianism doesn't do this. It looks to create equality for everyone and not just giving more opportunities to some groups. This theory over time will just cause more problems over time because who knows where the line is drawn? How many boost in life would we have to give member of disadvantaged groups before they feel life is equal. Life should be about working hard and getting ahead not things handed to you.

This brings the paper to criticisms of utilitarianism. To start we'll talk about the amount of time it takes to reach a decision. Some people feel this theory takes too long to come to a decision and by that time the situation has either passed with no resolution, worsened with time or been solved too quickly and causes more harm than good. You have to remember though this theory is flexible and if situations need to be acted in a timely fashion then as long as the action taken doesn't exceed the consequence of the situation with no action then it's okay to make the action without calculating it first.

The next criticism would be that some calculated actions can lead to unforeseeable consequences. With this sometimes not all variables are not accounted for or they have a better impact on the situation than what was believed. A utilitarian would then change their course of action to get it back on track to promote the good within the majority. If their action was not able to be changed they would let the action run its course and then calculate a solution to fix the unforeseeable consequence.

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Population size is another concern. People feel the overall population is too big to instill this kind of theory. It would be nearly impossible to promote the greater good for the majority over a population this big. The distribution of resources is also another problem. A utilitarian would believe everything should be distributed equal. Everything being equally distributed would promote equality throughout people and would promote the greater good for the majority.

With this information utilitarianism surely checks out on top. This theory seems to fit the needs of many. It has many good qualities about it such as equality and looking out for the majority and not just oneself. After reading this information I'm sure you can also come to the conclusion the utilitarianism is the best theory for society at this moment in time.