

# Differences between deontology and act utilitarianism philosophy essay



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Deontology is an ethical theory whose name is derived from the Greek word “ deon”, meaning duty or obligation. Deontology holds that people act in an ethically acceptable way whenever they act in accordance with their duties and obligations. But how do we know what our duties and obligations are? Professional codes of conduct often provide good examples of the different kinds of duty that might fall within a deontological theory. For example, doctors are expected to act in accordance with a code of conduct that is very different from the ones that might apply to teachers or policemen.

Deontology holds that some acts are always wrong – even if they achieve morally admirable ends. For example killing, lying and breaking promises is always wrong and according deontological theory we have a duty not to do these things.

Let’s take a look at some strengths and weaknesses of Deontology. One very important feature of Deontology is its consistency – a deontologist acts in a predictable and reliable way, takes his/her promises seriously and honors his/her duties and obligations. So consistency of this kind is very valuable and this is an advantage of this theory.

Another strength of deontology is that it makes sense of supererogation, that means acting above and beyond duty, or exceeding one’s obligations like in example with a hand-grenade in the Chapter 2. 2.

And the final strength of Deontology is that it can take account of special obligations – obligations someone has as a result of standing in a certain relationship to someone or something else. Examples of special obligations would be: the obligations parents have to their children; the obligations

employers have to their employees; the obligations doctors and nurses have to their patients. Special obligations are created by the relationships that people stand in, and they are limited to cover only the people defined by those relationships.

Talking about weaknesses of Deontology is that there is nothing strikingly rational about it. Deontology requires a justification for the duties and obligations, and the difficulty is that it is not clear where that justification is supposed to come from.

The second weakness of Deontology is a problem with conflicting duties and obligations. Moral dilemmas are created when duties come in conflict, and there is no mechanism for solving them.

A final major weakness of Deontology is that it appears to be indifferent to the consequences that actions undertaken in accordance with duties and obligations might have no matter what is happening deontologist always has to follow his/her duties or obligations.

The opposite of Deontology is the ethical theory known as Act Utilitarianism. It has a single simple principle: “ Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.” The principle focuses attention on the consequences of actions, rather than on some features of the actions, so no action is itself right or wrong. Breaking a promise, lying, causing pain, or even killing a person may, under certain circumstances, be the right action to take, but under other circumstances, the action might be wrong. Using the principle, we are

supposed to consider the possible results of each action and then we are to <https://assignbuster.com/differences-between-deontology-and-act-utilitarianism-philosophy-essay/>

choose the one that produces the most benefit (happiness) at the least cost (unhappiness).

The theory has three main strengths: it is well-meaning; it is rational and it is situational. Act Utilitarianism is well-meaning theory, the central idea behind it is to act in every case so as to bring the greatest amount of happiness at the expense of the smallest amount of suffering. This is a positive feature and an advantage of this theory.

The second advantage of Act Utilitarianism is that it is rational – the Act Utilitarian tries to decide which action to perform on the basis of a calculation. The good consequences of each possible action are added together; the total of bad consequences is then set against the good consequences, to yield the “score”; whichever action “scores” the highest is identified as the best action to perform.

The final strength of Act Utilitarianism is that it is situational – this theory addresses ethical dilemmas on a case-by-case basis. Because the Act Utilitarian attempts to assess the balance of good and bad consequences that will follow from each possible course of action, no two situations will be treated in the same way.

The weaknesses of Act Utilitarianism include:

Impossible to predict. There is no way of knowing in advance what the long-range consequences of an action will be, there is no way of using this theory as a means for deciding which action, in any given circumstances, is the right action to perform.

No room for special obligations or supererogation. From the Act Utilitarian perspective, supererogation is completely meaningless- saints and heroes do no more than they should do.

Inconsistency. The Act Utilitarian's behavior is not consistent – sometimes he keeps the promise, sometimes not, it depends if keeping the promise will bring the most happiness, then he will keep the promise.

Injustice and unfairness that is produced by inconsistency

After exploring all strengths and weaknesses of these two theories I came to conclusion that they are completely opposite theories and none of them is perfect in a view of decision-making procedure. In most real life situations I would prefer to use Deontology to analyze and resolve moral dilemmas, because this theory is based on duties and obligations, has more morality, more consistency and has room for justice and it concerns for special obligations. Although it is not a very useful theory in situations where there are conflicting duties and obligations and when you have to consider circumstances and also consequences of actions while making a decision.