

Utilitarianism

[Sociology](#), [Ethics](#)



Utilitarianism Key Features - - - Relativist Theory — — — — — — — — No
 Absolutes Morality Depends on individual circumstances Happiness is the
 most important thing Quality and Quantity of Happiness need to be taken
 into account The Measure of Usefulness or Fittingness for purpose an action
 may have Teleological Ethical theories such as Utilitarianism tend to rely on
 the principle of utility It is the way of measuring how useful an action is in
 bringing about the consequences that we desire Equality The Happiness of
 each individual person is equally important No Person's happiness is more
 important than another's You can work out the right action mathematically.
 Not absolute rules but we would all make the same decision under the
 circumstances. No rules. Principles are used to govern right and wrong rather
 than rules in Act Utilitarianism In Rule Utilitarianism, J. S. Mill introduced
 some beneficial rules, which acted as guidelines Hedonistic Principle of Utility
 - Egalitarian — — — - - - Hedonistic Calculus — — — — — Anti-Legalistic Harm
 Principle — — Put forward by Mill to avoid restricting the freedom of the
 minority. It states that each person can do whatever they want, as long as it
 does not negatively impact on the freedom of other people Teleological
 Ethics - In order to understand Utilitarianism, you must first study
 Teleological Ethics, which share many principles with Utilitarianism. -
 Teleological Ethics is to judge whether or not an action is moral by purely
 looking at the result or consequence of the action. - This is also known as
 'Consequentialism'. Teleological Ethics - In Teleological Ethics, there are no
 moral absolutes. - Teleological Ethics only consider the consequence of an
 action, and disregard the motive or circumstances. - Teleological Theories
 are consequentialist (based on consequences) - Actions only have

Instrumental Value, not intrinsic value. (see table below to see definitions)

Problems with Teleological Ethics - How do you decide what a morally good or bad consequence is? - There are many conflicting factors - We can't tell the future, we have no way of knowing what the consequences will be! The Principle of Utility - Teleological Ethical theories tend to rely on the Principle of Utility - This is defined as the "measure of usefulness or fittingness for purpose an action may have" - A Principle of Utility is a way of measuring how useful an action is in bringing about the consequences that we desire - The Principle of Utility of Utilitarianism is Happiness. This is for the following reasons: — It is universally valued and desirable — Subjective (opinion matters) — However, it is also open to abuse - as it cannot be easily defined. - This links to Hedonism Hedonism - Hedonism is the belief that happiness is more important than anything else - Pleasure or happiness are often interchangeable and used to mean the same thing " Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do as well as what we shall do. " - David Hume Before Utilitarianism - Hume linked Utility with Happiness - It is difficult to define Happiness - Aristotle saw no difference between living well (flourishing) and living normally. Well being is part of the good life. This can include comfort and enjoyment Act Utilitarianism 'Act Utilitarianism' is the earliest form of Utilitarianism. It was first put forward by scholar Jeremy Bentham - Act Utilitarianism is a Relativist theory, which means that nothing is always right or wrong and the choice of actions depend on circumstances, which allows flexibility and is intuitive. - It also rejects God, as there is no proof as to whether or not God exists. It also rejects the Bible and religion in

general. This removes the need for faith which makes it a theory that can be supported by both religious and secular people. - There are no absolute rules in Act Utilitarianism, which means that there is no unfairness and is a more flexible theory. This makes the people more important than the rules. - Act Utilitarianism uses a Hedonic Calculus to work out the right action for people to do. This creates a simple, objective, mathematical, tangible and logical way of working out what is right and wrong. - It is also a Hedonistic theory, this means that happiness is more important than anything else. This is good because we all agree that happiness is good, and an objective base for morality (meaning of life) which fits in well with modern society. " The good is that which will bring about the greatest sum of pleasure and the least sum of pain for the greatest number" -Jeremy Bentham Hedonic Calculus - The Hedonic Calculus is a formula that can be used to work out the right action mathematically - It is simple, objective, mathematical, logical and tangible. - The Hedonic Calculus uses the following factors to establish the presence of happiness: Rule Utilitarianism 'Rule Utilitarianism' superseded Bentham's Act Utilitarianism. It was put forward by scholar John Stuart Mill, who had learned about Utilitarianism for most of his life, as his father James Mill was a colleague of Jeremy Bentham. Rule Utilitarianism - Mill argued that not all forms of happiness or pleasure were of equal value, which was seemingly what Bentham was implying - He also recognised that, in life, it is easy to settle for the more immediate and sensual pleasures, rather than the nobler and more refined ones. - Mill goes beyond the Hedonic Calculus of Act Utilitarianism by recognising that there are many different ways of assessing its value - Mill was concerned to link his utilitarian theory with Jesus'

teachings by claiming that to love your neighbour as yourself constitutes 'the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality'. - Mill also suggested a positive place for rules within an overall utilitarian approach. His one rule that he introduced was known as the Harm Principle - it stated that everyone should be able to do what would make them happy, unless the majority of people affected, are negatively affected. - Mill stated that general rules such as the Harm Principle should be obeyed as they give overall benefit to society, but they can be broken in exceptional circumstances. " It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied" -John Stuart Mill

Strong and Weak Rule Utilitarianism

Strong Rule Utilitarianism holds that one should never break a rule that is established on utilitarian principles - **Weak Rule Utilitarianism** holds that there may be situations where breaking the rules is acceptable, in order to bring about the greatest good for the greatest number, but generally keeping the rules (eg. Telling a lie is generally wrong, but there may be circumstances where it acceptable in order to bring about the greatest good for the greatest number)

Rule Utilitarianism Preference Utilitarianism - 'Preference Utilitarianism' superseded Mill's Rule Utilitarianism. It was put forward by several scholars, who advocated it over a period of time. - They are: — Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900) — R. M. Hare (1919-2002) — Peter Singer (1946-present) - Preference Utilitarianism uses Preference over Happiness or Pleasure as the Principle of Utility. - Preference Utilitarianism also takes other factors into account, such as duty - This means that most people would get what they wanted

Prima Facie Obligations - " Prima Facie" — At First Sight - This is the idea that we do not value strangers as highly as friends or family - Most of us judge morality as ' agent

relative', we will favour some people above others. - Utilitarianism requires us to judge all people equally and not consider Prima Facie obligations - This is a criticism of Utilitarianism as to abandon prima facie duties seems to go against all instinct - Some people argue that people should be treated as ends in themselves and not means to an end. - It is necessary for a utilitarian to defend against this position. Motive Utilitarianism - Henry Sidgwick put forward a theory of Utilitarianism which became known as 'Motive Utilitarianism' - It states an action can be considered to be good if its motive was to bring about the greatest happiness for the greatest number, regardless of the actual outcome (which links to Situation Ethics)