



What is Utilitarianism?

Act Utilitarianism

Act Utilitarianism was created by Jeremy Bentham. Bentham believed an action that brings the greatest amount of happiness to the greatest amount of people is the right action. This is because he believed that: *‘Nature had been placed under the governance of two sovereign masters; pain and pleasure’*.

This quote essentially meant that people were controlled by doing the most pleasurable things and avoiding anything painful.


For this reason Act Utilitarianism is considered **hedonistic** because it focusses on pleasure. It is also considered **quantitative** because it focusses on the amount of pleasure. It is also considered to be **teleological** because it focuses on the consequences of an action rather than the action itself. This means that awful crimes such as murder could be justified (allowed) as long as the consequences in the end were good.

In order to work out which action will produce the greatest amount of pleasure for the greatest number of people, Bentham created the **Hedonic Calculus**. This was a 7 step calculator to try and work out the consequences of an action before they even happened.

The 7 steps are:

1. Intensity - how intense will the pleasure be?
2. Duration - how long will the pleasure last?
3. Certainty - how likely is it that pleasure will occur?
4. Propinquity - how soon will the pleasure occur?
5. Fecundity - will the action lead to future pleasure?
6. Purity - will the action lead to future pain?
7. Extent - how many people will benefit from the action?

Bentham's Godson, John Stuart Mill, came along and said that there were too many problems with utilitarianism. He said it was too simple to just focus on pleasure and pain as humans are more complex than this. He famously said: *“It is better to be a human dissatisfied than a pig satisfied.”*



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Key Terms

Ethics	The principles that control a person’s behaviour.
Morality	The principles of right and wrong.
Meta Ethics	The study of ethical language.
Normative Ethics	The study of ethical actions.
Deontology	Whether something is right or wrong is based on the action.
Teleology	Whether something is right or wrong is based on the consequence.
Quantitative	Relating to the quantity (amount) of something.
Qualitative	Relating to the quality of something.
Legalism	A system of rules that are always meant to be followed.
Antinomianism	A system of no rules and any action is acceptable.
Ethical Theory	Ethical theories attempt to clarify what is right and wrong and teach us how we should act.
Moral Philosophy	The study of the ethics and morality.
Utility	The state of being useful.
Ambiguity	When something doesn’t have a set answer.
Infallible	Cannot be wrong

What is Ethics?

Meta VS Normative Ethics

Ethical theories can be divided into two categories:

Meta Ethics: The study of ethical language. For example, “what is the definition of evil?”.

Normative Ethics: The study of ethical actions. For example, “why is violence bad?”.

Meta Ethics focusses on what “good” and “bad” actually means, whereas Normative Ethics focusses on why actions are considered “good” and “bad”.

What is Natural Law Theory?

Natural Law Theory was created by St Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas believed it was our human nature to do good and avoid evil. He called this **synderesis**.

Natural Law Theory is based on **five primary precepts** (rules).

1. Preservation of Life.
2. Continuation of Human Species.
3. Education of Children.
4. Live in an Ordered Society.
5. Worship God.

What is Situation Ethics?

Situation Ethics was created by Joseph Fletcher. Fletcher believed what was right and wrong depended upon the individual’s situation.

Fletcher rejected legalism (rules) and antinomianism (no rules). He argued that rules could be broken for reasons of love.

In order to help people make the most loving decision, Fletcher created four **working principles** to consider when making a decision.

1. Pragmatism - actions must achieve a loving outcome.
2. Personalism - we should always show love for people.
3. Relativism - the right action depends on the situation.
4. Positivism - our faith should include the most loving action.