

Moral Systems, Ethical Concepts & Theories

Utilitarianism

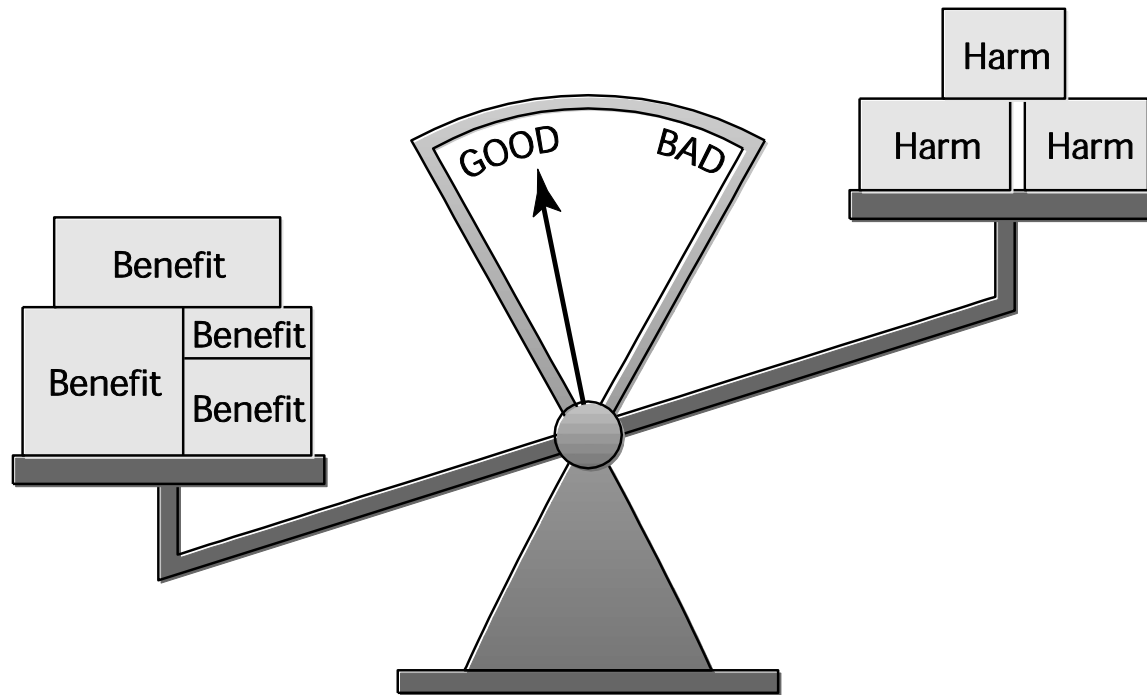
Principle of Utility

- Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill
- An action is good if it benefits someone
- An action is bad if it harms someone
- **Utility**: tendency of an object to produce happiness or prevent unhappiness for an individual or a community
- Happiness = advantage = benefit = good = pleasure=profit
- Unhappiness = disadvantage = cost = evil = pain

Principle of Utility (Greatest Happiness Principle)

- What makes behavior right or wrong depends wholly on the **consequences.**
- Focus is on the outcome of an act or application of a rule, and not on intention/ behavior or attitude

Principle of Utility



The Principle of Utility

Also called the **Greatest Happiness Principle**.

Utilitarian stress the social **usefulness** of particular **actions** and **policies** by focusing on the **consequences** that result from those **actions** and **policies**.

It means that an action is right (or wrong) to the extent that it increases (or decreases) the total happiness of the affected parties.

Types of Utilitarianism

- Act Based Utilitarianism
- Rule Based Utilitarianism

Act Utilitarianism

Act-based utilitarianism

- An individual act (X) is morally acceptable if the consequences that result from (X) produce the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of persons affected by the act.
- In short, we should analyze each of our **actions** from the perspective of how much happiness we believe they will produce.

Evaluating a Scenario Using Act Utilitarianism

A state is considering replacing a curvy stretch of highway that passes along the borders of a large city. Would building the highway be a good action using Act Utilitarianism ?

Evaluating a Scenario Using Act Utilitarianism

Compensation to the homeowners of about 150 houses which lie on or very near the proposed path of the new, straighter section of highway= \$20 million

Constructing the new highway, which is three miles long, would cost the taxpayers of the state another \$10 million.

Suppose the environmental impact of the new highway in terms of lost habitat for morally significant animal species is valued at \$1 million.

Every weekday, 15,000 cars are expected to travel on this section of highway, which is one mile shorter than the curvy highway it replaces.

Assuming it costs 40 cents per mile to operate a motor vehicle, construction of the new highway will save drivers \$6,000 per weekday in operating costs.

The highway has an expected operating lifetime of 25 years. Over a 25-year period, the expected total savings to drivers will be \$39 million.

We'll assume the highway project will have no positive or negative effects on any other people.

Since the overall cost of the new highway is \$31 million and the benefit of the new highway is \$39 million, building the highway would be a good action.

Case for Act utilitarianism

- Focus on happiness is reasonable
- Practical, attractive to most people

Case Against Act Utilitarianism

- Unclear whom to include in calculations
- Ignores our innate(inherent) sense of duty:
 - *Case of X made a promise to Y.*
 - *Keep promise will produce 1,000 units of good for Y.*
 - *Breaking promise will produce 1,001 units of good to Z*
 - *So, Act Utilitarianism will prefer not keeping promises!!*

Utilitarianism

An individual act (X) is morally acceptable if the consequences that result from (X) produce the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of persons affected by the act.

Workable Theory as focus on happiness is reasonable. Also this theory is practical which appeals to most people.

Rule Utilitarianism

- An action is right if it follows to a rule that leads to the greatest good, which means the **correctness of a rule is determined by the amount of good it brings about when followed.**

Rule Utilitarianism

- Rule utilitarianism believes that the moral correctness of an action depends on the correctness of the rules that allows it to achieve the greatest good.

Rule Utilitarianism

- In contrast, act utilitarians judge an act in terms of the consequences of that act alone.
- In short, we should base our behavior on **rules** that are understood to maximize collective happiness.

Difference between Act and Rule Utilitarianism

For rule utilitarian, the correctness of a rule is determined by the amount of good it brings about when followed. In contrast, act utilitarian judge an act in terms of the consequences of that act alone.

Rule Utilitarianism

- Both rule utilitarianism and Kantianism are focused on rules, and the rules of these two ethical theories may have significant overlap. **However, the two ethical theories derive moral rules in completely different ways.**
- A rule utilitarian chooses to follow a moral rule because its universal adoption would result in the greatest happiness.
- A Kantian follows a moral rule because it is in harmony with the Categorical Imperative: all human beings are to be treated as ends in themselves, not merely as means to an end.
- In other words, the rule utilitarian is looking at the consequences of the action, while the Kantian is looking at the will motivating the action.

Case for Rule Utilitarianism

- Compared to act utilitarianism, it is easier to use the rule.
- Not every moral decision requires performing utilitarian calculus.
- Moral rules survive exceptional situations
(will not be trapped with the case of not keeping promises, realizing that the long term of keeping promises is better)

Case for Rule Utilitarianism

- Avoid problem of bias
 - *(asks is it ok for everyone, not is it ok for me)*
- Appeals to wide cross section of society
 - In other words, an action is justifiable if allowing that action would, as a rule, bring about greater net happiness than forbidding that action.
 - Workable ethical theory