

# Introduction to Utilitarianism

1. **What** is utilitarianism?
2. **How** does utilitarianism work?
3. **Why** is utilitarianism important?

## 1. **What** is utilitarianism?

The field of ethics has three branches: normative ethics, meta-ethics, and applied ethics; utilitarianism is located in the first of them, and is one of several different normative ethical theories. Additionally, it is a teleological ethical theory, which means its adherents are concerned with the consequences of actions rather than the actions themselves. To understand utilitarianism, it is necessary to understand where it is located in the field of ethics. Write definitions for "normative ethics" and "utilitarianism".

### Normative Ethics

### Utilitarianism

## 2. **How** does utilitarianism work?

Egoism asserts that an action is good if it produces pleasurable consequences for the moral agent (i.e. the person taking action) and evil if it produces painful consequences for him or her. Alternatively, utilitarianism asserts that whether an action is good or evil depends on the type of consequences it produces for all the people affected by it (or, according to Peter Singer, all the sentient beings). This distinction demonstrates that utilitarianism is altruistic, at least by the standard of egoism. Write a definition for "egoism".

### Egoism

Utilitarianism works because of the existence of two different sensations: pain and pleasure; without them it could not operate as an ethical theory. Generally, utilitarians are not particular about how they define pain and pleasure, instead using them as catch-all terms that cover a whole range of sensations. In utilitarianism, the word "pain" denotes sensations that reasonable people try to avoid and the word "pleasure" refers to sensations that reasonable people seek out. Make a note of different types of pain and pleasure.

## Types of Pain and Pleasure

Pain	Pleasure

Although there are different types of utilitarianism with subtle variations, all utilitarians argue that any action that either prevents, decreases or diminishes painful sensations is good, whilst any action that promotes, increases or intensifies them is evil. Conversely, any action that either prevents, decreases or diminishes pleasurable sensations is evil, whilst any action that promotes, increases or intensifies them is good. For utilitarians, happiness is synonymous with good, whilst unhappiness is synonymous with pain. Make a note about how utilitarianism works.

## How Utilitarianism Works

### 3. **Why** is utilitarianism important?

Utilitarianism is an important normative ethical theory for various reasons, including the fact that it is secular, significant, and simple. It has been particularly influential in the United Kingdom and the United States. Make a note of three reasons why utilitarianism is important.

## Why Utilitarianism Is Important

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