



# PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

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# Ethical Theories



The diagram consists of three identical rectangular boxes arranged horizontally. Each box has a dark blue header and a light blue body. The text 'Utilitarianism', 'Virtue Ethics', and 'Deontological Ethics' is centered in each box respectively. The boxes are slightly offset to the right, creating a layered effect.

**Utilitarianism**

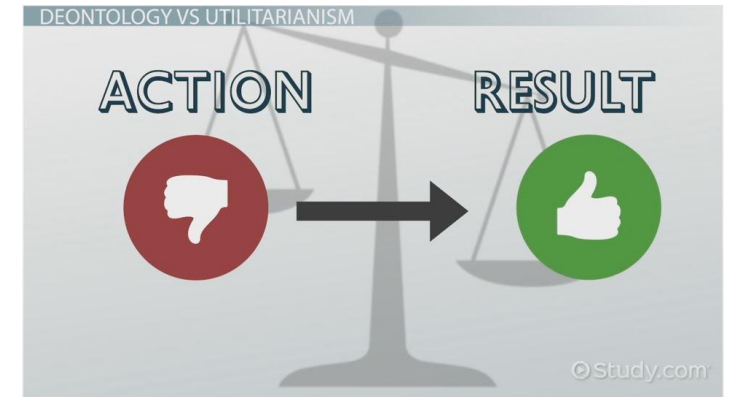
**Virtue  
Ethics**

**Deontological  
Ethics**



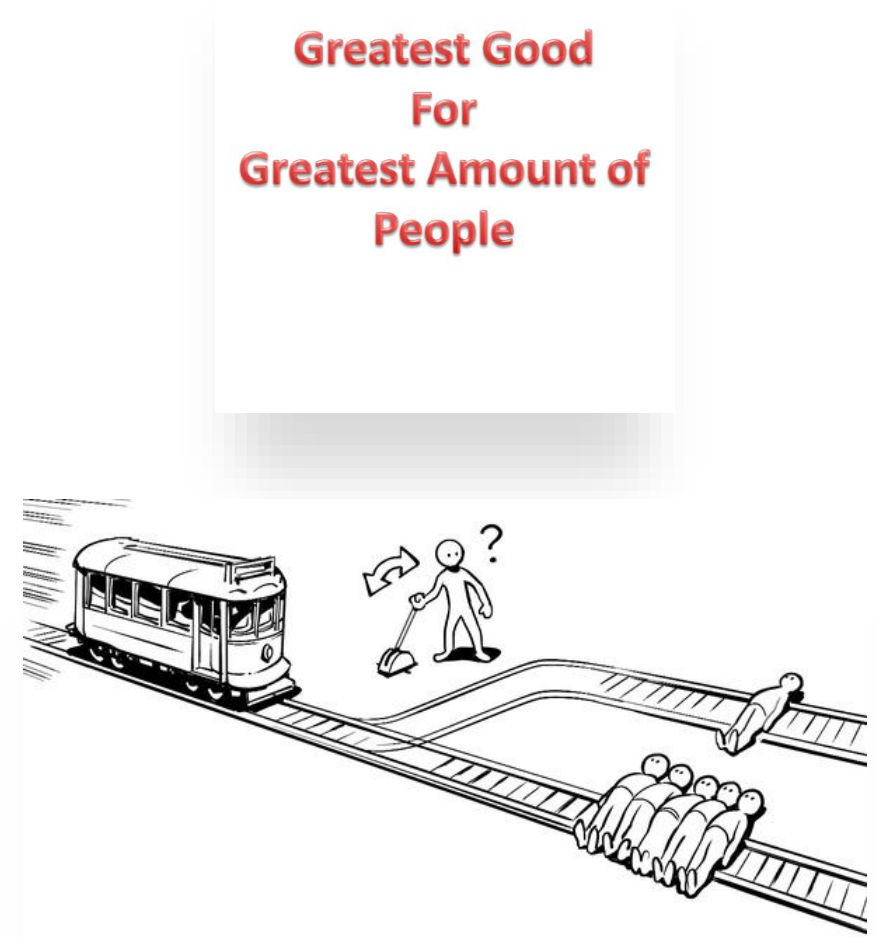
# Ethical Theories/Approaches to Ethics or Different Foundations of Ethics?

- Ethical Theories/Approaches attempt to explain the existence and facts of ethics and ethical behavior.
  - Example: What is right and wrong, and why certain actions/behavior is termed/considered as 'Right' and others 'Wrong'?
- There're numerous ethical theories; however, we as part of our course discuss three such theories/approaches:
  - Utilitarianism, Deontological Ethics, Religious Approach(Islamic Concept of Ethics)



# Utilitarianism

- This theory suggests that we find the meaning of ethics by looking at the consequences. Thus an action is right if it maximizes the good, producing the greatest good for the greatest number (Mill 1806–73).
- “Utility” - Greatest good/pleasure for the greatest number.



# Utilitarianism

- According to utilitarianism, actions and policies should be evaluated on the basis of the benefits and costs, they will impose on society.
- Anything that gives maximum benefit, profit to the society has more utility too.

# Act Utilitarianism (Bentham's utilitarianism)

- Jeremy Bentham founded (1748-1832) tradition Utilitarianism.
- “An action is right from an ethical point of view if and only if the sum/total of utilities produced by that act is greater than the sum/total of utilities produced by any other act, the agent could have performed in its place.”

# Economists Concept of Utility

- A long line of economists, beginning in the 19th century, argued that economic behavior could be explained by assuming that human beings always attempt to maximize their utility and that the utilities of commodities can be measured by the prices people are willing to pay for them.

# Cost–Benefit Analysis

- Utilitarianism is also the basis of the techniques of economic cost–benefit analysis.
- This type of analysis is used to determine the desirability of investing in a project (such as a dam, factory, or public park) by figuring whether its present and future economic benefits outweigh its present and future economic costs.



# Utilitarianism & Efficiency

- We can see that utilitarianism fits nicely with a value that many people prize: efficiency.
- Efficiency can mean different things to different people, but for many it means operating in such a way that one produces the most one can with the resources at hand.

# Utilitarianism & Its Measurement

- Though utilitarianism offers a superficially clear-cut method of calculating the morality of actions, it relies upon accurate measurement, and this can be problematic.
- There are five major problems with the utilitarian reliance on measurement:
  1. Comparative measures of the values things have for different people cannot be made, we cannot get into each others' skins to measure the pleasure or pain caused.

# Utilitarianism & Its Measurement

2. Some benefits and costs are impossible to measure. How much is a human life worth, for example?
3. The potential benefits and costs of an action cannot always be reliably predicted, so they are also not adequately measurable.
4. It is unclear exactly what counts as a benefit or a cost. People see these things in different ways.
5. Utilitarian measurement implies that all goods can be traded for equivalents of each other. However, not everything has a monetary equivalent.

# Rights and Duties

- In general a right is a person's entitlement to something. An entitlement is called a legal right.
- Entitlements can come from laws or moral standards, the latter are called moral rights or human rights.

# Moral rights

1. Moral rights are closely correlated with duties.
2. Moral rights provide individuals with autonomy and equality in the free pursuit of their interests.
3. Moral rights provide a basis for justifying one's actions and invoking the aid of others.

# Issues in Utilitarianism

- According to utilitarianism, even the most fundamental rules, such as the human rights formulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), can be broken if the positive consequences are greater than the negative ones: 'the end justifies the means'.
- On utilitarian grounds, an engineer could be asked to bend a fundamental rule of professional conduct because of the positive consequence it would have.



# Issues in Utilitarianism

- The Case of Sam:
- “ Sam, a nice human being, goes to the hospital to visit his only living relative, his sick aunt. His visit coincides with five medical emergencies at the hospital. One person needs a liver transplant, another a spleen transplant, another a lung transplant, another a new heart, and a fifth a new pineal gland. Each of the five patients are tremendously important, much-loved persons whose death would bring a great deal of grief and actual physical discomfort to a great number of people. Sam’s death, on the other hand, would be mourned by no one (except possibly his aunt). The top members of the hospital administration, all strict utilitarians, lure Sam into an operating room, remove all his vital organs, and distribute them to the other needy patients, thereby operating (literally) in accordance with the principle of utility: the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people.”

# Issues in Utilitarianism

- Unable to deal with two kinds of moral issues: those relating to Rights and those relating to Justice.
- Next issue is *the problem of distributive justice*. Distributive justice refers to the value of having a just distribution of certain important goods, like income, happiness, and career.
- Utilitarianism can lead to an unjust division of costs and benefits.
- Utilitarianism looks only at how much utility is produced in a society and fails to take into account how that utility is distributed among the members of society.

# Issues in Utilitarianism

- “According to Act Utilitarianism, if 10 people would be happy watching a man being eaten by wild dogs, it would be a morally good thing for the 10 men to kidnap someone (especially someone whose death would not cause grief to many others) and throw the man into a cage of wild, hungry dogs.”

# Issues in Utilitarianism

- “If I am to bring the greatest happiness to the greatest number, not putting my own happiness above others, that may lead to a dilemma. I live in a neighborhood where 83% of my neighbors use drugs. I could make them most happy by helping supply them with cheap drugs, but I feel uncomfortable doing that. What should a utilitarian do?”

# Issues in Utilitarianism

1. You attempt to help an elderly man across the street. He gets across safely.

- Conclusion: According to utilitarianism, is it a good act or bad act?

2. You attempt to help an elderly man across the street. You stumble as you go, he is knocked into the path of a car, and is hurt.

- Conclusion: According to utilitarianism, is it a good act or bad act?

# Application of Utilitarian Theory

- If you can use eighty soldiers as a decoy in war, and thereby attack an enemy force and kill several hundred enemy soldiers, that is a morally good choice even though the eighty might be lost.
- If lying or stealing will actually bring about more happiness and/or reduce pain, Act Utilitarianism says we should lie and steal in those cases.



# Application of Utilitarian Theory Actual Cases

- The Ford Pinto case: A defective vehicle would sometimes explode when hit.
- The model was not recalled and repaired by Ford because they felt it was cheaper to pay the liability suits than to recall and repair all the defective cars.

# Rule Utilitarianism

- Utilitarian's have devised an alternative version, called rule utilitarianism.
- In this version, instead of looking at individual acts to see whether they produce more pleasure than the alternatives, one looks only at moral rules at actions of a particular type.
- Just because an action produces more utility on one occasion does not show it is right ethically.

# Rule Utilitarianism

- Rule utilitarianism may not completely answer all of the objections raised by critics of utilitarianism.
- A rule may generally produce more utility and still be unjust: consider rules that would allow a large majority to take unfair advantage of a smaller minority.

# Rule Utilitarianism

- The theory of the rule utilitarian, then, has two parts, which we can summarize in the following two principles:
  1. An action is right from an ethical point of view if and only if the action would be required by those moral rules that are correct.
  2. A moral rule is correct if and only if the sum total of utilities produced if everyone were to follow that rule is greater than the sum total utilities produced if everyone were to follow some alternative rule.

# Act vs. Rule Utilitarianism

- The distinction is to do with what the principle of utility is applied to.
- According to Act Utilitarianism the principle is applied directly to a particular action in a particular circumstance.
- According to Rule Utilitarianism the principle is applied to a selection of a set of rules which are in turn used to determine what to do in particular situations.

# Class Task

- “Apply act-utilitarianism and rule-utilitarianism in resolving the following moral problems. Do the two versions of utilitarianism lead to the same or different answers to the problems?”
- Jill was aware of a recent company memo reminding employees that office supplies were for use at work only. Yet she knew that most of the other engineers in her division thought nothing about occasionally taking home notepads, pens, computer disks, and other office “incidentals.” Her eight-year-old daughter had asked her for a company inscribed diary like the one she saw her carrying. The diary costs less than \$20, and Jill recalls that she has probably used that much from her personal stationery supplies during the past year for work purposes. Is it all right for her to take home a diary for her daughter without asking her supervisor for permission?”



# References

- Mike Martin and Ronald Schinzinger, “Introduction To Engineering Ethics”, McGraw Hill, New York, 2010
- Miscellaneous Journals and Internet Resources.