

Utilitarianism: The One Page Version ☺

What is it?

- It focuses primarily on positive (“good”) and negative (“bad”) outcomes for EVERYONE affected by a decision (e.g., to hospitalize or not), an action (e.g., to tell or not tell a family you are mandated reporting them), or a policy (e.g., an agency policy on reporting adolescent drug use) as the MOST important thing to consider in ethical decision-making.

How do I use it?

- The “Greatest Happiness” principle is what Utilitarianism centers around. Cliff notes version: You approve (or disapprove) of an action according to its likelihood (Vegas Odds) that it will increase or decrease the happiness of the person/group who is in question. More happiness = Positive/“Good” ethical decision.
- 6 rules of thumb to apply for a utilitarian ethical decision are:
 - Intensity (how **MUCH** happiness or pain is experienced)
 - Duration (how **LONG** does the happiness or pain last)
 - Certainty (how **LIKELY** is the person/group to experience this happiness or pain)
 - Nearness (how **CLOSE** in time is this happiness or pain)
 - “Purity” (how probable is this happiness to lead to other pains or to lead to other happiness’s)
 - Extent (how **MANY** people/groups will experience the happiness or pain)

Pros

- VERY easy to apply (just weigh was there more good than bad)
- VERY intuitive (no intro philosophy course required ☺)
- VERY good with “systems” (i.e., groups)
 - Some ethical models make most sense individual to individual not individual to system

Cons

- “The Trolley Problem”
- Rights vs. Happiness
- The Psychopath Problem/AKA the “fair play” problem