

# Moral Theories

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## Meta-ethical theories:

- emotivism
- relativism
- error theory
- realism

## Normative theories:

- consequentialism
- deontology
- virtue theory

# Moral Theories

Consequentialism: a class of moral theories in which the moral value of any human action or behavior is determined exclusively by its outcome.

based on teleology: philosophical belief that the value of an action or object can be determined by looking at the purpose or end of the action or object.

Examples: egoism and utilitarianism

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What do you think?

Is it ever morally okay to torture an individual if the outcome is really good (or prevents something really bad)?

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Ethical Egoism: the consequentialist theory that everyone should only act in order to maximize his or her own individual pleasure or happiness

(Distinct from Psychological Egoism: everyone acts in order to maximize his or her own individual pleasure or happiness.)

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Ethical Egoism: the consequentialist theory that everyone should only act in order to maximize his or her own individual pleasure or happiness

Appeal of egoism: says it's right to be selfish. You get to be selfish *and* a good person.

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Objection 1: if a wicked action maximizes your happiness, then ethical egoism endorses it. (James Rachels, “Ethical Egoism”)

- To increase his profits, a pharmacist filled prescriptions for cancer-patients using watered-down drugs.

- A nurse raped two patients while they were unconscious.

- Parents fed a baby acid so that they could fake a lawsuit, claiming the baby’s formula was tainted.

- A 13-year-old girl was kidnapped by a neighbor and kept shackled in an underground bomb-shelter for 181 days, while she was sexually abused.”

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Objection 2: Egoism goes against the following principle: “We can justify treating people differently only if we can show that there is some factual difference between them that is relevant to justifying the difference in treatment.”

-James Rachels, “Ethical Egoism”

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Utilitarianism: a consequentialist theory according to which all people ought to act in order to maximize the greatest pleasure or happiness for the greatest number.

“the greatest good for the greatest number”

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## Difficulties for utilitarianism

1. How do we define happiness?
2. How do we measure happiness?

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Objections to utilitarianism: Cases in which utilitarianism “gives the wrong answer to moral questions.”

1. The riot prevention case
2. The healthy donor case
3. The promise-breaking case

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A reply to the objections by the utilitarian: distinguish between act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/util-a-r/#H2>):

1. Act Utilitarianism: the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number should be applied on a case by case basis. Choose the act that produces the greatest good for the greatest number.
2. Rule Utilitarianism: “a) a specific action is morally justified if it conforms to a justified moral rule; and b) a moral rule is justified if its inclusion into our moral code would create more utility than other possible rules (or no rule at all)”

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Consider our objections again with the distinction between act and rule utilitarianism in mind

1. The riot prevention case
2. The healthy donor case
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