



Utilitarianism – Revision Help Pack

This pack contains focused questions to help you recognize what essential information you need to know for the exam, structured exam style questions to help you understand what information is necessary in an exam answer plus a few sample questions for you to practice as you revise.

Section 1 – the Nature of the Theory

Utilitarianism is a teleological, relative theory.

What do these 2 key terms mean?

Teleological _____

Relative _____

Give 2 key strengths and 2 key weaknesses of any kind of ethical theory which is both relative and teleological:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
1.	1.
2.	2.



Section 2 – Jeremy Bentham

1. What kind of Utilitarianism is most associated with Bentham?

2. What should good actions result in?

3. What one thing does Bentham believe we should avoid in life?

4. How does Bentham work out the right thing to do in a situation?

5. What are the 7 elements of this?

6. By what term is the phrase "greatest happiness for the greatest number" better known?

7. Give one ethical situation / decision which Bentham would say was morally good (keep it brief)

Main Strength of Bentham's Utilitarianism:	Main Weakness of Bentham's Utilitarianism:

Key Terms you need to know:

Teleological, Relativism, Hedonism, Utility Principle,
Hedonic Calculus, Act Utilitarianism



Section 3: John Stuart Mill

1. What is the name of the kind of Utilitarianism most associated with JS Mill?

2. What kind of happiness / pleasure was Mill most concerned with?

3. What is the famous quotation from Mill which sums up his attitude to happiness?

4. What is the main difference between Mill's Utilitarianism and Bentham's Utilitarianism?

5. Give an example of a rule which would maximize happiness:

6. Give an example of an ethical decision that Mill would agree with, but Bentham would not. (keep it brief)

Main Strength of Mill's Utilitarianism:	Main Weakness of Mill's Utilitarianism:

Key Terms you need to know:

Quantitative, Qualitative, Rule Utilitarianism,



Section 4: Preference Utilitarianism

1. With whom is Preference Utilitarianism most closely associated?

2. How does Preference Utilitarianism differ from the classical Utilitarianism of Bentham & Mill?

3. Why would sacrificing an individual for the benefit of the majority be a problem for a preference utilitarian?

Main Strength of Preference Utilitarianism:	Main Weakness of Preference Utilitarianism:

Section 5—Your Own Views

1. Is happiness a good aim to have in life?

2. With Utilitarianism, especially Bentham's, the minority's suffering is justified. Do you think this is acceptable?

2. Could a Religious believer accept the principles of Utilitarianism?

3. Should people be able to decide for themselves what to do in each ethical situation or should they follow set rules?

4. Is what makes us happy always what is good for us?



The next level...

When you have a very good understanding of the essential elements of Utilitarianism, you should challenge yourself by considering these key areas. Understanding the complexity of the issues will be really important if you are hoping to achieve the highest grades.

Evaluating Utilitarianism:

1. What key problems arise when trying to consider the consequences of an action to determine whether it is good or not?

2. Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre criticises Utilitarianism because that the pursuit of justice is superseded by the pursuit of happiness. What does justice mean for a Utilitarian and why might this be a problem? (hint: human rights)

3. Is Mill correct to give greater weight to intellectual pleasures? Is the distinction between high & low pleasures always easy to identify?

4. How easy is it to quantify pleasure & pain?

5. Preference utilitarians take into account the preferences of the individual in decision making. How does Singer's concept of *personhood* apply to this and what problems are raised as a result? (eg unborn / new born children)

6. How compatible is Utilitarianism with Christianity? (self-sacrifice, golden rule)



Section 6 - Exam Technique

There are 2 parts to an exam question.

In a part 1 you will be asked to *explain, describe, give an account of, examine* etc etc. You need to give as much accurate detailed knowledge as you can that is relevant to the question. You do **not** need to give your own views here, or any strengths or weaknesses. Concentrate on the facts!

This is worth 30 marks and should take you 20 mins

In a part 2 you will be asked to *discuss, evaluate, analyse* etc etc. This question will always be related to the section A which came before it so there is no need to go into technical detail – just concentrate on different points of view, strengths & weaknesses and your own view.

This is worth 15 marks and should take you 10 mins

Now, have a go at planning an answer to (and writing timed answers to) the following:

Part 1

- Explain how Act Utilitarianism differs from Rule Utilitarianism
- Give an account of Bentham's Utilitarianism
- Examine how a Utilitarian would make a moral decision

Part 2

- "Satisfying the majority is the most important consideration in making ethical decisions" discuss.
- "The pursuit of happiness is the most important goal in life" discuss
- How comparable is Utilitarianism with key Christian principles?
- To what extent can Utilitarianism be seen as a reliable moral theory?



Section 7 – Structuring your Answer.

Part 1 will ask for facts and detailed explanation. Use key words and quotations where appropriate.

Examine how Utilitarianism would be applied to an ethical situation of your choice (Not Abortion or Euthanasia)

Intro:

Explain what type of ethical theory Utilitarianism is (2 key words)

What does Utilitarianism aim to maximize / avoid?

- Jeremy Bentham – Explain his version of Utilitarianism (use the questions in section 2 of this pack to remind you what essential information needs to be included.)
- Outline an ethical dilemma (Sadistic guards)

Explain whether Bentham would agree with this or not (don't forget to say **why**)

- John Stuart Mill - Explain his version of Utilitarianism (use the questions in section 2 of this pack to remind you what essential information needs to be included.)
- Explain whether Mill would agree with the example you gave above (don't forget to say **why**)

- Conclusion:

Sum up why Bentham and Mill would respond in the way you have said to the ethical dilemma you chose.

Part 2 will always ask you to evaluate the theory—don't repeat you wrote in part 1.

these can always follow the same structure: 2 points of view followed by your own response.

“To what extent can a Religious believer accept Utilitarianism?”

- In some respects a religious believer can accept Utilitarianism...

Self sacrificial, all people are counted equally

- However, most Religious believers would entirely reject Utilitarianism...

Minority should not be left to suffer, morality should come from God, not society, pleasure is not main aim in life.

- In my opinion...