

UTILITARIANISM ESSAY-PHILOSOPHY

- 5-7 Page Paper
- Pick a topic that seems hard, for they are all hard. (Cite all sources, even in the rough draft, and notice that even a single stolen line will earn you paper an “F”)

POSSIBLE ESSAY TOPICS: (USE ONE)

1. Is the morally right thing to do always the thing which will produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number? (Mill)
2. Are you really, right now, free to do anything other than to read to the end of this sentence? Is it ever fair to blame humans for what they must, by necessity, do? (Hospers & Kane)
3. Can it be moral to break a law you consider unjust? (Plato’s dialogue, “The Crito” vs. Martin Luther King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”).
4. Does a close look at the history of science prove that science isn't really making progress towards a more and more accurate picture of the universe? (Kuhn vs Hempel, Popper)
5. Can the concept of sexual perversion be made coherent? (Nagel vs. modern common sense)
6. Is morality only a game designed by the weak to protect themselves against the strong? What sort of answers must a moral system be able to give us if it is to be moral system, and who must it apply to? Nietzsche vs Kant
7. Can a civil war itself be a piece of art? Tolstoy vs. you.
8. Can moral relativism provide a ground for moral tolerance? (Relativism-Williams)

It is as simple as this: *Utilitarianism* — *A moral theory that says that an action is morally right just as insofar as it causes an increase in human happiness or a decrease in human misery.*

The Big Idea: You have **UTILITARIAN INTUITION!** So you should:

- 1) Embrace this theory of mortality.
- 2) Consider carefully some of the criticisms of this theory to see if your intuitions might really not be so utilitarian after all.
- 3) Ask whether Nietzsche is right to think your concern for the welfare of the herd is really an embarrassing, life denying expression of your own refusal to meet life’s challenges.

Here are some questions to muse over as you articulate your intuitions. (Use a couple of these questions throughout essay to prove topic question)

—Would you torture an innocent child to save L.A. from an atomic threat? If you were trying to respond morally to such an ugly crisis, should you try to use your head or your head or your heart?

—Could the correct moral theory ever make you do things you think are unjust or unfair? That is, shouldn't your morals and your politics be consistent?

—Can you ever escape from moral considerations and do something, say, a lunatic dance in the privacy of your own home, where what you do simply isn't open to moral assessment? How big is morality, does it include everything you do?

—Who is likely to be more happy, the altruist or the egoist? If you think it is the altruist and you decide to become one for that reason, does that make you an altruist or an egoist?

—If Utilitarianism is supposed to be impractical, as the future consequences of our actions are uncertain, then wouldn't this same criticism show Egoism is impractical too?

—If pleasure is the only thing that is intrinsically valuable, why don't we want to be hooked up to pleasure generating machines all our lives?

—Should you keep a promise you have made only if doing so seems most likely to increase the total amount of happiness for all?

—Can you ever confront a case where you must choose between two things that are BOTH morally wrong, so you find yourself in a sort of a moral blind alley? Or is it always at least morally correct to pick the lesser evil, the best of a bad lot?