



## Mains Practice Question

**Q.** Discuss the ethical theories of utilitarianism and deontology. How do these theories differ in their approach to decision-making? (150 words)

06 Jun, 2024 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

### Approach

- Introduce by giving a background to emergence of utilitarianism and deontology
- Give ethical theories of utilitarianism and deontology
- Mention key difference in their approaches
- Conclude in a balanced manner.

### Introduction

In **moral philosophy**, the quest to determine what constitutes right and wrong has led to the development of various ethical frameworks.

- Among these, **utilitarianism and deontology** stand out as two of the most influential and widely debated theories.
- Both offer distinct lenses through which to view moral dilemmas

### Body

#### Ethical Theories of Utilitarianism and Deontology

- **Utilitarianism:**
  - **Ethical Theory:** Utilitarianism, championed by **Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill**, emphasizes maximizing overall happiness or well-being for the greatest number of people.
  - **Example:** Consider a policy decision to demolish a historic building to create affordable housing for a large number of citizens.
    - A **utilitarian** would likely support this action despite the loss of a cultural landmark, as it **benefits a greater number of people.**
- **Deontology:**
  - **Ethical Theory:** Deontology, with Immanuel Kant as its prominent figure, focuses on the **inherent rightness or wrongness of actions**, regardless of the consequences.
    - In this case, certain moral duties and principles are considered absolute and universal.
  - **Example:** A situation where a government official can secure a crucial economic deal by bribing a foreign official.
    - Despite the potential benefits for the nation's economy, **a deontologist would object to bribery** as it violates the principle of honesty.

#### Key Difference in their Approaches:

Aspect	Utilitarianism	Deontology
Focus	Consequences of actions	Adherence to moral rules

		or duties
<b>Decision Basis</b>	Outcomes and overall welfare	Intentions and adherence to moral laws
<b>Flexibility</b>	High; actions judged by results	Low; actions judged by conformity to rules
<b>Key Question</b>	"What leads to the best outcome?"	"What is my moral duty?"
<b>Main Criticism</b>	Can justify unethical means for good ends	Can lead to rigid, impractical decisions
<b>Application</b>	Often in public policy, economics	Often in personal ethics, human rights

## Conclusion

In the complexity of real-life ethical dilemmas, a nuanced understanding of both theories is valuable. Effective **moral reasoning** often requires **balancing the deontological respect for duties and rights** with the **utilitarian consideration of outcomes** and overall well-being.

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