

Use of examples

Aim to use one simple example early in your essay to show you understand what the theory means in practice

For example within an essay on **Utilitarianism**: ... *Therefore, if telling a lie will have better consequences in a particular situation than telling the truth, one should lie. This contrasts with a deontological rule that one should always tell the truth.*

Situation Ethics.... *Therefore a situationist like Fletcher would argue that abortion may sometimes be the right thing to do and sometimes the wrong thing to do. It depends what is the more loving thing to do for the particular people involved. This contrasts with a moral absolutist view.*

Abortion: *To take an extreme case: if a woman becomes pregnant as a result of a rape, there is something morally repugnant about the idea that she must bear the rapist's child. A utilitarian will see nothing intrinsically wrong in abortion, and there may be strong reasons as to why abortion could be the welfare-maximising option. A Situationist will see nothing intrinsically wrong in abortion, and strong reasons why abortion could be the loving option.*

You could go on, depending on the particular question, to go deeper into the implications of the theory.

An interesting point is raised for a utilitarian if a woman decides she wants to have a baby in a situation in which the consequences are such that it is better for all involved if an abortion is done. This might not arise with rape, but is possible in a case where the foetus is severely handicapped. This seems to indicate a difficulty for Utilitarianism as a moral system.

An interesting point is raised for a Situationist if the people involved all hold strong views which are all loving. What if a woman wants to abort her child but her parents want to save their grandchild and are prepared to take full responsibility for him? This seems to indicate a difficulty for Situation Ethics as a moral system.

An interesting point is raised for a traditional Christian thinker who believes in preserving innocent human life. What if making the woman have a baby will cause her death? This seems to indicate a difficulty for Natural law as a moral system.

An interesting point is raised for a Kantian because of Kant's insistence on the importance of autonomy. What if having a child will prevent that woman from pursuing a plan for her life which she has freely chosen as her duty, for instance to develop her gifts as a musician? Kant does regard developing one's talents as a duty. This seems to indicate a difficulty for Kantianism as a moral system.

An interesting point is raised for a Virtue ethics thinker since it appears that a virtuous person will be likely to decide to have the baby even though he or she

might want to help another person in the same situation have an abortion. This seems to indicate a difficulty for virtue ethics as a moral system.

Choice of examples

Avoid examples that

- a) fail to clarify the point you are trying to make
e.g. if you want to distinguish between act and rule utilitarianism, which of the following questions would you use?

A. Would you use a sum of money to save ten people from starving rather than spend it on an expensive dinner for yourself?

B. Would you permit an innocent person to be condemned for a crime if that condemnation would produce greater benefit than any other option?

Or if you want to distinguish between Bentham and Mill, which of the following would you use?

A. Does the pleasure of the sadists outweigh the pain of their victim?

B. Does the pleasure of studying philosophy (including the work this involves) outweigh the pleasure of a drug-induced sensation of pleasure?

I.e. you are looking for a good discriminator

- b) raise a different issue
E.g. a case where an accident victim will die if he is moved, but is preventing the rescue of others who are also trapped. It is an interesting triage dilemma, but not a euthanasia case.

- c) Over-complicate the issue. Keep it simple.

This would do: *A famous example is the 'deathbed promise': I promise to honour a dying person's wishes and use all his money for a dogs' home. I then discover he was a millionaire and that his estate could provide good care for the dogs and fund vitally-needed hospital beds for humans. Do I have to keep my promise? Surely I would be justified in considering the consequences of my actions, even if it means breaking a promise?*



g. strengths of utilitarianism: *I make a promise, I discover that keeping my promise will have worse consequences than breaking it, so the right thing to do is to break it. A deontological thinker, by contrast, will say that you should keep the promise irrespective of consequences.*

This seems to be a strength of the utilitarian approach.

g. strengths of utilitarianism: *I make a promise, I discover that keeping my promise will have worse consequences than breaking it, so the right thing to do is to break it. A deontological thinker, by contrast, will say that you should keep the promise irrespective of consequences.*

This seems to be a strength of the utilitarian approach.

