| Metaethics | about the nature and methodology of ethics |
| Normative ethics | defends general or specific moral principles |

- Consequentialism: We ought to do whatever maximizes good consequences.

- Nonconsequentialism: Some kinds of action are wrong in themselves, and not just wrong because of their consequences.

Ima
Utilitarian

The proper aim
of morality is
to promote
happiness and
diminish misery
for everyone.

I reject the exceptionless-rules approach that I was taught as a child (e.g., that it's always wrong to lie, steal, break your promises, or disobey your parents).

This approach is inconsistent, inhumane, and has clear Dr.-Evil counterexamples.

Let me explain
what led me to
utilitarianism.

- Human happiness and misery give a solid basis for evaluating the norms of different cultures.

- The golden rule leads to utilitarianism.

- Utilitarianism can be based on other views too – since some might see it as self-evident or as based on God's will.

There are two ways to apply utilitarianism. The indirect approach follows rules of thumb (e.g. stealing usually doesn't have the best consequences). The direct approach sums up likely benefits and harms.

	Break promise	Don't break it
My brother	-5	+6
My mother	+6	-2
Myself	-1	-2
Total	+0	+2

Pleasures are positive.
Pains are negative.
Go with highest total.

Classical utilitarianism: We ought to do whatever maximizes the balance of pleasure over pain for everyone affected by our action.

Whose good to maximize? All sentient beings.

Alternatives: ourselves (egoism), our group, all humans.

How evaluate consequences? By pleasure/pain (*hedonism*: only pleasure is intrinsically good, only pain is intrinsically bad).

Alternatives: *preference view* (whatever is desired for its own sake), *pluralism* (many things: knowledge, virtue, pleasure, etc.).
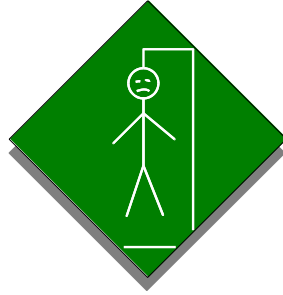
Utilitarianism seems to have bizarre implications. Imagine a case where lynching you maximizes the balance of pleasure over pain.

Utilitarians could respond by:

- biting the bullet,
- denying that such cases are possible, or
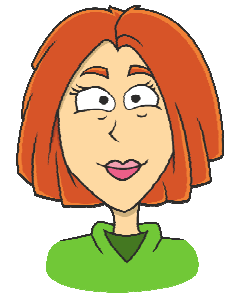- modifying their theory.

"I think electing me would have the best conse-
quences – and lying about my opponent promotes
this. So, as a utilitarian, I lie about my opponent."

(Both candidates think this way, and so
politics turns dirty, which harms democracy.)
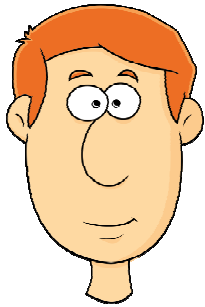
Society would prosper
better if candidates
followed strict principles
against dirty politics.

Candidate A

Candidate B

Would these things automatically be right if they maximized the total pleasure?

- Slavery/racism
- Killing your miserable rich father and giving his money to charity
- Sentencing an innocent person to death
- Using dishonest instead of honest means
- Hurting another

Another problem is that utilitarianism is difficult to apply and easy to rationalize.

Ima Rule Utilitarian supports pluralistic rule utilitarianism

We should evaluate consequences in terms of <u>various goods</u>, including virtue, knowledge, pleasure, life, and freedom.

We ought to do what would be prescribed by the <u>rules</u> with the best consequences for people to try to follow.

Pluralism is better than hedonism

- Our rational preferences would see some pleasures as intrinsically bad and some non-pleasure items as intrinsically good (like virtue, knowledge, life, and freedom).

- Happiness isn't the same thing as pleasure!!

- Pluralism lets us answer some of the objections to classical utilitarianism (like the lynching, slavery, and killing-your-miserable-father examples).

Our duties are determined by the <u>rules</u> with the best consequences for people to try to follow.

- Rules are easier to apply and harder to rationalize. So it often has better consequences for us to follow fairly strict rules instead of calculating consequences.

- Rule utilitarianism has less bizarre implications about killing – since presumably it has better consequences if society follows a strict rule against killing with only a few well-defined exceptions (like self-defense).

While a big improvement, pluralistic rule utilitarianism still has a few problems:

- It's a difficult view to apply. So it's difficult to decide if it has sensible implications.

- Even if it leads to the right results, it would seem to do so for the wrong reasons. Isn't it wrong in itself to kill an innocent person? Wouldn't it be wrong even if a rule permitting it had the best consequences?