



### The Crying Baby and Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is an ethical theory which basically argues that we should always seek to provide the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest amount of people. So, for example, if 8 out of 10 people vote for dinner being at Pizza Express rather than Pizza Hut, all 10 people will attend dinner at Pizza Express.

Now imagine this famous thought experiment : An extended family of over 15 people have been forced into hiding because of the persecution of their heritage in their country. If they are found, they will certainly be murdered, simply because of their racial heritage – otherwise, they are entirely moral, innocent and good people.

One of the family members is a 5 month old baby. Because of the freezing cold conditions in which the family are hiding, she cries loudly for over 10 minutes. The rest of the family know that if she continues to cry, they will all be found and murdered, including the 5 month old baby.

### Tasks

- Complete the following tasks, in no more than 500 words.
1. Explain what you think a Utilitarian's response would be to this situation; would they continue to hide the baby, hoping that she won't be heard by the enemy, or would they suggest abandoning or even murdering the baby, because her presence could lead to the death of 14 other family members?
  2. Taking into account your answer to task 1, do you think that Utilitarianism can be considered to be a useful ethical theory? What do you think is good about it? Is there anything that you dislike about it? Why? Try to give examples where Utilitarianism could, or could not, provide a moral course of action.

Bring your project, printed and ready to hand in, to the first Philosophy and Ethics lesson you have in **September**. Make sure you come and ask for help beforehand if you are stuck.

**Good Luck!**