

PART
III

MORAL THEORIES AND MENTAL FRAMES

"My work is based on the assumption that clarity and consistency in our moral thinking is likely, in the long run, to lead us to hold better views on ethical issues."

Peter Singer

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this section, students are expected to:

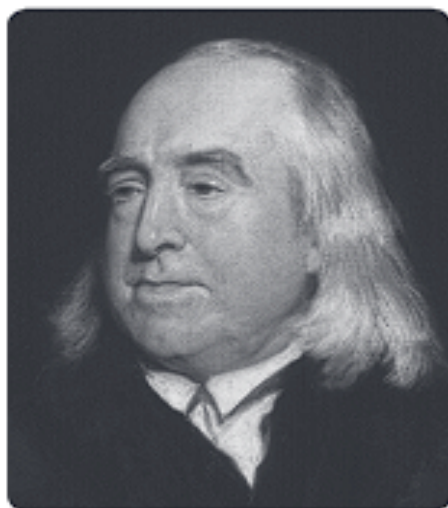
1. explain the role of mental frames in moral experience;
2. classify and articulate the dominant mental frames namely Utilitarianism, Duty Ethics, Virtue Ethics, Natural Law Theory, and theory of Justice;
3. critique the dominant mental frames to test its appropriateness as a guideline for moral evaluation; and
4. make use of the mental frames to analyze moral experiences; and make ethical sound judgements based on principles, facts, and stakeholders.

CHAPTER

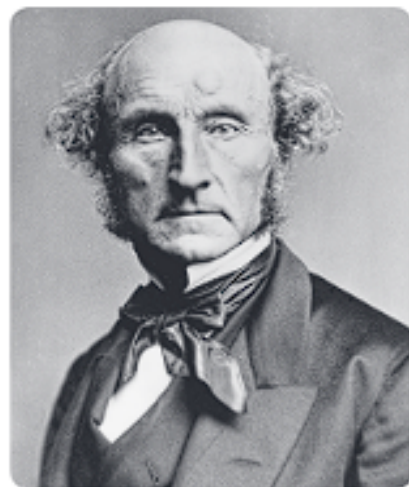
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UTILITARIANISM

Bentham's and Mill's theory of utilitarianism is influenced by the movement that started in Renaissance towards the modern period, the golden age of science and technology which is widely known as the enlightenment or the age of reason. "Known as the Classical Utilitarians, Bentham and Mill, were concerned with legal and social reform." (Driver, 2014) Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) was an English philosopher known for his political and ethical theories. Bentham's father was a subscriber to the ideas of enlightenment rationalist. (IEP: Bentham) John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) on the other hand was a British philosopher and economist and a son of a British historian, economist and philosopher James Mill. The young Mill was exclusively educated by his very strict and disciplinarian father. He carried on the works of Jeremy Bentham on Utilitarianism.



Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)
<https://en.wikipedia.org>



John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

<https://en.wikipedia.org>

Utilitarianism advocates for the consideration of individual experience over the reigning moral standard imposed on individual persons. The theory does not teach that an action has intrinsic and absolute moral worth. Clearly, this movement is a movement away from dominion of authorities (feudal lords, kings and Church of the medieval ages) towards respecting individual choice, from ideal or universal to experiential or particular. Instead, for instance, of following the rules of the authorities which are absolute, one may also have to start with individual human experience. It is one thing to say that "Thou shall not kill" and it is another thing to ask "Why one has to be euthanize? or Why a specific girl has to abort her pregnancy?" In other

words, Utilitarian gives us another way of being moral people apart from the rules and scriptural prescriptions. Thus, reason alone gives us an edge to be moral while actions and laws are to be made in accordance with their circumstantial advantages rather than in their intrinsic nature.

Utilitarianism has various forms but in general the doctrine holds that the morality of human action is determined by its usefulness, for this theory the best action is the one that maximizes utility. Bentham describes utility as *"...the property of something whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness or to prevent the happening of mischief pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party¹ whose interest is considered."* (Bentham 1823, Chap 1, 3) Mill adds, *"...the Greatest Happiness Principle holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness."* (Mill 1863, Chap 2)

THE CONSEQUENTIALIST ASPECT OF UTILITARIANISM

Clearly, by emphasizing the outcome rather than the action qualifies Utilitarianism to be classified as consequentialist. Unlike Christian morality which is based on absolute and universal rules, Utilitarianism mainly based its judgment on the result of the action or law. Laws and rules are not absolute.

As consequentialist, Utilitarianism does not classify any action or law as good or bad apart from its outcome or result. Killing, for instance, is not classified as evil or bad, and helping is not classified as good unlike the traditional conventional notions that believes the intrinsic moral worth of an action. Human actions (and laws such as legal abortion), for Utilitarian, do not have intrinsic moral worth. It is the consequence that determines whether one's action is good or bad. Also with actions which absolutist teaches to be good, such as, helping and giving alms, they are neither good nor bad apart from the consequences. There are heroes and martyrs who are fully capable of sacrificing their own greatest good for the good of others, but Mill asserts, *"A sacrifice which does not increase, or tend to increase, the sum total of happiness, it considers as wasted."* (Mill 1863, Chap 2)

1 Bentham means by Party as individual or community.

THE HEDONIST ASPECT OF BENTHAM'S UTILITARIANISM

In the beginning of his book *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Bentham writes: "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure." (Bentham, 1823, p. 1) Clearly, Bentham subscribes to the teaching of Hedonism at some degree. Hedonism comes from the Greek word *ἡδονή* (*hēdonē*) for pleasure. Hedonism is a category of various but related theories but in general "All hedonistic theories identify pleasure and pain as the only important elements of whatever phenomena they are designed to describe." (Weijers, n.d.) the earliest writings on Hedonism could be traced back in different traditions and people, Cārvāka tradition in India about 600 B.C.E., the Cyrenaics, founded by Aristippus (c. 435-356 B.C.E.), and Epicurus of the ancient Greece, the founder of Epicureanism between 341-271 B.C.E. (See Weijers, n.d.) "For Epicurus, happiness was the complete absence of bodily and especially mental pains, including fear of the Gods and desires for anything other than the bare necessities of life." (Weijers, n.d.).

Following the doctrine of Hedonism, Bentham believed that the consequence of human action should produce more pleasures than pains in order to be judged as good, if it produces more pains than pleasures, then it should be judged as bad. Since the only intrinsic good is pleasure and the intrinsic bad is pain.

HEDONIC CALCULUS

When an individual (or government) has to make a moral decision one measures the value of action (or law) according to the metric Hedonic Calculus. Hedonic Calculus, also known as felicific calculus, is introduced by Bentham in the Chapter 4 of his work *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. The result of the equation will determine the morality of the decision or law. Seven criteria are involved in such a measuring device, as Bentham's described:

1. its intensity. (How intense is the pleasure or pain?)
2. its duration. (How long does the pleasure or pain last?)
3. its certainty or uncertainty. (How probable is the occurrence of pleasure or pain)
4. its nearness or remoteness. (Also known as propinquity: How far off is the pleasure or pain?)
5. its fecundity, i.e., its chance of being followed by sensations of the same kind (pleasure by pleasure, pain by pain)
6. its purity, i.e., its chance of not being followed by sensations of the opposite kind (pleasure by pain, pain by pleasure).
7. its extent, i.e., the number of persons to whom it extends or (in other words) who are affected by it.

"Bentham does not recommend that they figure into every act of moral deliberation because of the efficiency costs which need to be considered." (Driver, 2014) We should also learn from experience and consider obvious facts. The Utilitarian Principle does not only apply to human actions alone; Laws can also be crafted if it could produce more pleasures than pains for the people. However, unlike the Divine Laws and Kant's Imperatives that are absolute, Bentham's is mutable. Thus, the law should be changed if the social conditions change or if the law no longer produces more pleasures than pains. *Thus, lawmakers have to be sensitive to changing social circumstances."* (Driver, 2014)

THE GREATEST HAPPINESS PRINCIPLE

Unlike other consequentialist ethical theories such as Egoism, Bentham and Mill concern themselves with the well-being and happiness of all people (or at least the majority). For Mill, the Utilitarian Standard...*"is not the agent's own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness altogether..."* (Mill 1863, Chap 2) A girl may abort her pregnancy but it must not only for her own pleasure but for many over one embryo. A dying 92 years old grandfather might be euthanized for the welfare of the entire family for if not doing so may result into miseries to all family members in the near future. Sacrifice one for the many but never sacrifice the many for one.

THE EUDAIMONIAN ASPECT OF MILL'S UTILITARIANISM

Mill uses Bentham's calculus but he uses it in qualitative sense. In Mills belief, Utilitarianism, put forward by Epicurus, has become a subject to many misinterpretations and clarifying it is one of the many objectives of his book *Utilitarianism*. Some critics and interpreters of Epicurean Utilitarianism employ straw man fallacy arguments by reducing Utilitarian notion of pleasure into merely pleasure of the beasts. Mill is dissatisfied with this sort of interpretation, he argues, "The comparison of the Epicurean life to that of beasts is felt as degrading, precisely because a beast's pleasures do not satisfy a human being's conceptions of happiness (Mill, 1863, Chap 2)." In Mill's interpretation, the Epicurean theory of life assigns "pleasure of the intellect, of the feelings, imagination, and of the moral sentiments...a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation (Mill, 1863, Chap 2)."

Mill admires and follows Bentham in almost all aspects but rejects some of the latter's tenets. Bentham views all sorts of pleasure (such as eating, dancing, happiness, health etc.) as equally the same but Mill views that there is a degree of pleasure. By degree I mean the quality of pleasure over quantity. Mill argues that it is absurd to suppose that pleasure should depend on quantity alone. Mill does not deny the desirability of the quantity of pleasure but, for him, to prefer the quality of pleasure is more desirable pleasure among the two pleasures.

This notion somehow can be summarized by Mill's famous analogy in Chapter 2 of his work *Utilitarianism*, "*It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.*" Fools are those who, in Mill's example, choose sensual pleasures (like drunkenness and voraciousness) at the expense of health even fully knowing well that health is a higher pleasure.

Some interpreters argue that while Bentham's Utilitarianism is Hedonist, Mill's is Eudemonian because while Bentham believes that pleasure is the greatest good; Mill believes that happiness is the greatest good.

Mill says, "*Utilitarianism, therefore, could only attain its end by the general cultivation of nobleness of character, even if each individual were only benefited by the nobleness of others, and his own, so far as happiness is concerned, were a sheer deduction from the benefit.*" (Chap 2)

Like Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume (1711-1776), Mill's moral evaluation's main concern is that of character, yet Bentham focused on act-evaluation. (Driver, 2014) In this sense, Mill pays attention also to one's character rather what one is doing.