



UCDAVIS

ECS 188 – Spring 2025

[Week 8]

UTILITARIANISM

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Mill Qualitative Calculus
(higher vs. lower pleasures)

Self-interest

Bentham Quantitative Calculus
(pleasure vs. pain)

Subjective
(belief)

Pleasure
(right)

Measure
(nature bestowed)

Pain
(wrong)

Right
(socially defensible)

Justice
(social scale ranking)

Social Duty
(ought to do)

Obligation

Moral Rules
(forbid **wrongful** interference with each other's freedom)

Why Vote?

Act Utilitarianism
(individual acts)

Desirable

Means
(action)

Choice

Ends
(utility)

Rule Utilitarianism
(category of acts)

Collectively
(recognized socially)

Objective
(belief)

desire happiness

Happiness
(maximization)

produce pleasure
prevent pain

That action is best, which procures the greatest happiness.

Francis Hutcheson
[Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue, p. 128]

That **property** in any **object**, whereby it tends to **produce** benefit, advantage, pleasure, good or happiness ... or ... to **prevent** the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness.

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two **sovereign masters**, **pain** and **pleasure**. It is for them alone to point out **what we ought to do**, as well as to determine what we shall do.

The **principle of utility** is the foundation of the present work...
By the principle of utility is meant that principle which **approves** or **disapproves** of every **action** whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to **augment** or **diminish** the **happiness** of the party whose interest is in question...

Jeremy Bentham
[An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, p. 130-131]

A passing remark is all that needs be given to the ignorant blunder of supposing that those who stand up for **utility** as the **test** of right and wrong, use the term in that restricted and merely colloquial sense in which **utility** is opposed to **pleasure**.

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, **Utility**, or the **Greatest Happiness Principle** ... that actions are **right** in proportion as they tend to promote **happiness**, **wrong** as they tend to produce the **reverse of happiness**.

By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain... The **moral rules** which **forbid** mankind to hurt one another (in which we must never forget to include wrongful interference with each other's freedom) are more vital to human well-being than any **maxims**, however important, which only point out the best mode of managing some department of human affairs.

John Stuart Mill
[Utilitarianism, p. 131]

It appears from what has been said, that **justice** is a name for certain **moral requirements**, which, regarded **collectively**, stand higher in the **scale of social utility**, and are therefore of more paramount **obligation**, than any others; though particular cases may occur in which some other **social duty** is so important, as to **over-rule** any one of the **general maxims of justice**.

To have a **right**, then, is, I conceive, to have something which **society ought to defend** me in the possession of. If the objector goes on to ask **Why it ought?** I can give him no other reason than general utility. ... There goes to the composition of the sentiment, not a **rational** only, but also an **animal** element, the thirst for retaliation; and this thirst derives its intensity, as well as its moral justification, from the extraordinarily important and impressive kind of utility which is concerned.

The utilitarian doctrine is, that **happiness is desirable**, and the only thing desirable, as an **end**; all other things being only desirable as **means to that end**. ...

Each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the **general happiness**, therefore, a good to the **aggregate of all persons**.

John Stuart Mill

[Utilitarianism, p. 132, p. 133, p. 129]