

Utilitarianism

the best for the most



George Matthews, Pennsylvania College of Technology

2020

Traditional society

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Traditional society



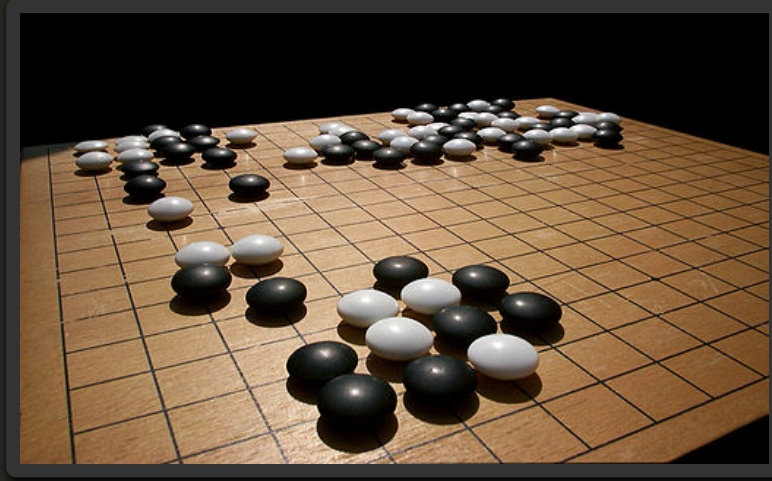
- Who you are matters, and some matter more than others for the sake of distribution of benefits, burdens and roles.
- **Assumption:** *the good of all* requires that we play the roles we are all assigned by nature and inherited social status.

Modern society

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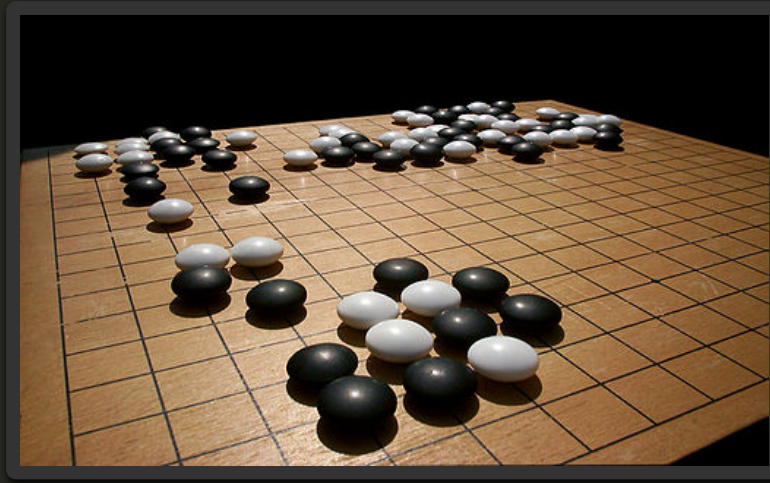


Modern society



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- **Assumption:** *the good of all* is best served by allowing individuals to pursue their own conceptions of what is good for them.

Utilitarianism

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- Utilitarianism offers itself as a common sense solution to the problem of finding moral common ground.
- We need not worry about the fact that we disagree on the *content* of a good life, since we all can agree that *whatever* it is that we are after in life, more satisfaction of our goals is always preferable to less.

Bentham's hedonistic utilitarianism



Jeremy Bentham
1748-1832

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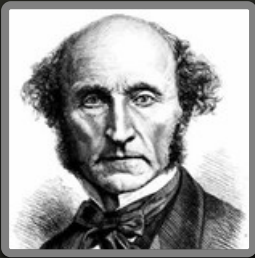
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- He attempted to quantify pleasures and pains and developed a method of moral calculation based on this.

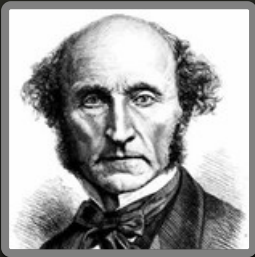
Mill's preference utilitarianism



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1806-1873

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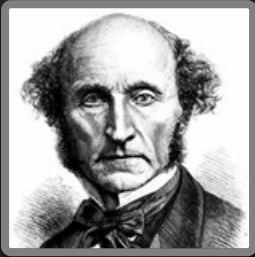
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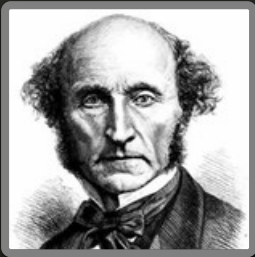


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- For him some desires are more inherently worthy of satisfaction than others so he rejected Bentham's simple hedonism.
- He tried to show how all moral rules could be explained as the attempt to help as many individuals satisfy as many of their preferences as possible.

Rational Choice

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2. Estimate the likelihood that different courses of action will satisfy your wants.
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How might this work?

From Self-interest to Morality

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Dwight



Pam

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How might we convince someone with Dwight's attitude to adopt Pam's view?

From Self-interest to Morality

Mill's argument

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Mill's argument

Rational maximizers of self-interest seek the best possible outcome.

The more people who benefit from my actions the better the outcome.

So we should always strive to get the best outcome from the most people.

Find out more

Utilitarianism, Frank Aragbonfoh Abumere, *Introduction to Philosophy: Ethics*.

Utilitarianism: Act and Rule: The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy has a comprehensive account including lots of discussion of contemporary versions of the theory.

Poverty and Our Response to it: in this Crash Course video, Hank Green discusses the morality of our responses to poverty and the work of a contemporary Utilitarian philosopher, Peter Singer.



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