

UTILITARIANISM: PART 1

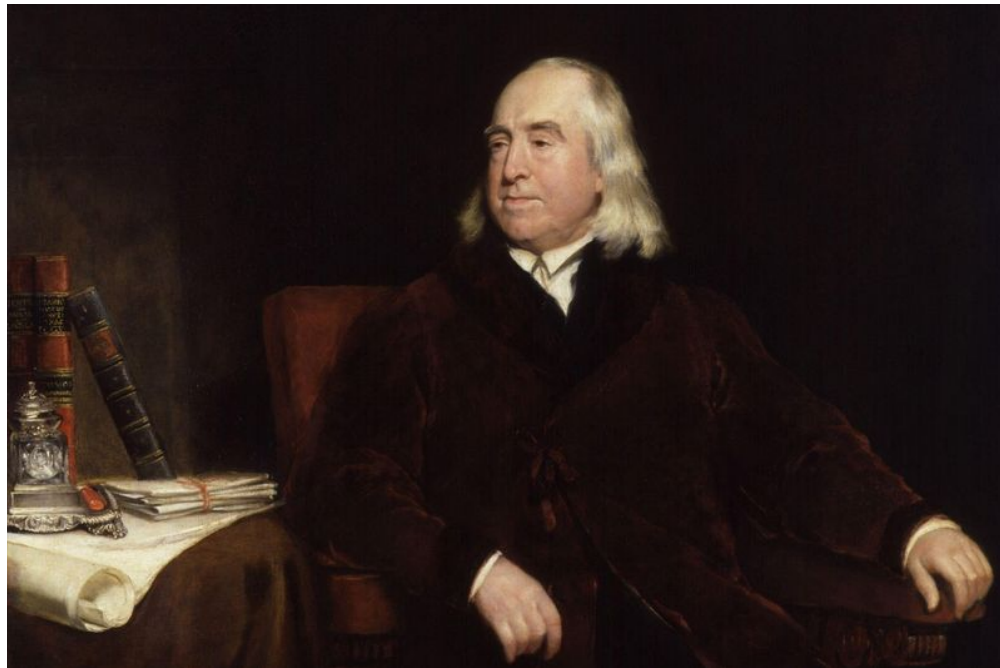
WHAT WOULD YOU DO?



CONSEQUENTIALISM

A **consequentialist** or **teleological ethical theory** claims that what makes an action right or wrong is the state of affairs that results from the action; quite simply a “right action” is one which has good consequences, a “wrong action” has bad consequences.

JEREMY BENTHAM [1748 - 1832]



PRINCIPLE OF UTILITY

Also known as “the greatest happiness principle”

“The principle of utility... approves or disapproves of every action according to the tendency it appears to have to increase or lessen—i.e. to promote or oppose—the happiness of the person or group whose interest is in question.”

_ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*

WHAT IS UTILITY?

“By ‘utility’ is meant 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 party whose interest is considered. If that party is the community in general, then the happiness of the community; if it’s a particular individual, then the happiness of that individual.”

_ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*

TWO CHARACTERISTICS OF UTILITARIANISM

1. Consequentialism
2. Hedonism

WHY HEDONISM?

“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 recognizes this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of that system.”

_ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*

TWO KINDS OF HEDONISM

1. Psychological Hedonism
2. Altruistic Hedonism

ENGLAND IN THE 18TH CENTURY



PREFERENCE FOR SECURITY

“Wars and storms are best to read of, but peace and calms are better to endure.”

HEDONIC CALCULUS

Intensity

Fecundity

Duration

Purity

Certainty

Extent

Propinquity

INTENSITY

How strongly a pleasure or pain is felt?

a pinprick vs severe back-pain

DURATION

How long the pleasure or pain lasts?

taste of ice-cream vs pleasure of finding something out

CERTAINTY

How likely it is that an act will deliver the same result each time it is performed?

Playing a game vs conversation with strangers

PROPINQUITY

How close is the pleasure and pain to the performance of an action?

scratching an itch vs investing

FECUNDITY

The chance that pleasure will be followed by other pleasures and pain will be followed by other pains.

Being honest vs being manipulative

PURITY

The chance that the generated pleasure will not be followed by pains will not be followed by pleasure.

drinking → hangover

nightouts with friends → happy memories

EXTENT

How many people will be affected?

pursuing a hobby vs volunteering for flood relief

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2. Agrees with our prior moral intuitions
3. Committed to equality
4. It is an empirical system

FURTHER READINGS

Jeremy Bentham - An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation
[Chapter 1 and Chapter 4]