

Utilitarianism

- An ethical theory behind the justification for 'the greater good'.
- Focused on the 'greatest happiness for the greatest number'.

Key Words:

- Teleological – the end justifies the means.
- Consequentialist – the consequence of an action determines if it is right or wrong.
- Hedonism – an ethical theory that determines what is right or wrong in terms of pleasure. ;)

General Strengths

- Assumes human well being is intrinsically good
- "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" – Matthew 7:12
- Motives may be good or bad but only consequences have an effect
- Encourages democracy
- Situational Flexibility
- Doesn't rely on metaphysical principles

General Weaknesses

- Demands predicting of long-term consequences which may be incorrectly calculated
- Motive is significant and shouldn't be ignored
- Not a universal theory

Jeremy Bentham, 1748–1832

- 'The Principles of Morals and Legislation' (1789)
- What is done in society should be judged as right or wrong depending on how it affects its citizens.
- Act utilitarianism – an action is morally good if it produces the most happiness and pleasure.
- Bentham's theories led to extensive social reform affecting Parliament, criminal law, the jury system, prisons, savings banks, cheap postage etc. It was a egalitarian system.
- Principle of Utility – 'what is the use of it?' – Something is good or bad according to its benefit for the majority. It is good if it produces pleasure and happiness, and a good act is one that produces the most pleasure and happiness.
 - As the Principle of Utility focuses on the greatest number, it is quantitative.
- Hedonic Calculus – Bentham's way of numerically calculating a moral decision. The following categories must be considered:
 - Remoteness – how close will the pleasure be?
 - Extent – how far will the pleasure stretch?
 - Certainty – how sure is it that the pleasure will come about?
 - Fecundity – will it bring the possibility of more pleasure?
 - Duration – how long will the pleasure last?
 - Intensity – how strong will the pleasure be?
 - Purity – will the pleasure be followed by pain?