



Component 3: Religion and Ethics
Theme 3: Teleological Ethics
Booklet 2 Utilitarianism

Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief

D	 <p>Classical Utilitarianism - Jeremy Bentham's Act Utilitarianism: happiness as the basis of morality: Bentham's theory of 'utility' or 'usefulness'; ultimate aim is to pursue pleasure and avoid pain; principle of utility ('the greatest happiness for the greatest number'). The hedonic calculus as a means of measuring pleasure in each unique moral situation; by considering seven factors: intensity, duration, certainty, remoteness, fecundity, purity and extent. Act Utilitarianism as a form of moral relativism, a consequentialist and teleological theory.</p>
E	 <p>John Stuart Mill's development of Utilitarianism: types of pleasure, the harm principle and the use of rules: Mill's idea that not all pleasure is the same: 'higher pleasures' (intellectual) are superior to 'lower pleasures' (basic physical pleasure); the 'Harm Principle': the actions of individuals should be limited to prevent harm to other individuals; not all actions need to be morally assessed as actions are morally right if they conform to a historical rule that has demonstrated that it fulfils the principle of utility (now known as 'Rule' Utilitarianism). Mill's Utilitarianism as a teleological/deontological hybrid.</p>
F	<p>Bentham's Act Utilitarianism and Mill's Rule Utilitarianism - application of the theory: The application of Bentham's Act Utilitarianism and Mill's Rule Utilitarianism to both of the issues listed below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. animal experimentation for medical research 2. the use of nuclear weapons as a deterrent

AO2 Issues for analysis and evaluation will be drawn from any aspect of the content above, such as:

- The degree to which pleasure can be seen as the sole intrinsic good.
- The extent to which Act and/or Rule Utilitarianism works in contemporary society.
- The extent to which Rule Utilitarianism provides a better basis for making moral decisions than Act Utilitarianism.
- Whether Utilitarianism promotes immoral behaviour.
- The extent to which Utilitarianism promotes justice.
- The extent to which Utilitarianism provides a practical basis for making moral decisions for both religious believers and non-believers.



Key Words

Moral relativism

Teleological

Consequentialist

Deontological

Utility

Principle of utility

Hedonic Calculus

Higher pleasure

Lower pleasure

Harm principle

Deterrent

What is Utilitarianism?

You have probably heard someone justify their actions as being for the greater good. Utilitarianism is the ethical theory behind such an idea.

Bentham's Utilitarianism is a **teleological** and **relativist** theory of ethics. **Teleological** theories of ethics look at the end purpose or goal of an action. Utilitarianism is also a **consequentialist** theory of ethics that looks at the consequences - results of an action - to decide whether it is right or wrong. **Relativist** ethical theories have no universal moral norms or rules and that each and every situation has to be looked at independently because each situation is different.

What are the implications of this?

- There can be no moral absolutes (absolutes are things that are always right or wrong whatever the circumstances).
- Nothing would be *intrinsically* or *inherently* right or wrong.
- Actions would have only instrumental value.
- Motives are neither good nor bad but morally neutral.

Example

A police officer accidentally discovers a man in a house with bomb making equipment. The man admits that a bomb has been planted nearby and that it will explode in one hour. The man refuses to tell the police officer where the bomb is. The police officer is on his own and could use force to make the man tell him where the bomb is. The police officer does not use force and goes 'by the book' even though he knows it will take over an hour for the police to arrive and start to question him.

1. Is this teleological or deontological?

2. Do you think it is ever acceptable to authorise someone to be tortured to save innocent lives?

Jeremy Bentham

The theory began with Jeremy Bentham (a philosopher of the Enlightenment period) who wanted to find a way of defining right or wrong. Whilst reading Priestley's essay *On Government* Bentham came across the expression '**the greatest good of the greatest number**' and cried out, like Archimedes, 'Eureka'

His theory was a response to the social changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution, which witnessed a mass migration of workers towards overpopulated towns, resulting in poverty, disease and alcoholism - the conditions in which people lived and worked were appalling.

Bentham came from a family of lawyers working in the city of London, but became disgusted with the law as then practiced since he felt that it was more about making money than helping those in need. He was a practical man concerned with the social conditions and particularly with the conditions of prisons and hospitals. He wanted to find a moral basis for law that could serve to benefit the whole of society.

Bentham believed the **established church** was not doing enough to create a more equal society and in fact was actively supporting the status quo, as shown in this is an extract from the hymn 'All things bright and beautiful.

*'The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them high and lowly,
And ordered their estate.'*

The theory encouraged prison reform, anti-slavery laws and the introduction of a postal service. In *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1789)* Bentham tried to establish a way of arguing for something to be good or bad according to its benefit for the majority of the people. He called this the **principle of utility**. Utility here means the *usefulness* of the results of actions. It is often expressed as 'the greatest good for the greatest number'. 'Good' is defined in terms of *pleasure* or *happiness* - so an act is right or wrong according to the good or bad results from the act and the good act is the most pleasurable. Since it focuses on the greatest good for the greatest number, **Bentham's theory is quantitative.**



Jeremy Bentham was born in London on 15th February 1748. He could read scholarly works at 3, played the violin at 5 and studies Latin and French at 6. At aged 12 he went to Oxford and trained as a lawyer. Bentham was the leader of the Philosophical Radicals who founded the Westminster Review. He died in London on 6th June 1832. His body was dissected and his clothed skeleton is in a glass case at University College, London.

Jeremy Bentham's Ethical Theory - Act Utilitarianism

Bentham developed his ethical system around the idea of pleasure and it is based on ancient **hedonism** which pursued physical pleasure and avoided physical pain. According to Bentham the most moral acts are those that maximise pleasure and minimise pain. An act would be moral if it brings the greatest amount of **pleasure** and the least amount of **pain**.

Bentham said: 'The **principle of utility** aims to promote happiness which is the supreme ethical value. Nature has placed us under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. An act is right if it delivers more pleasure than pain and wrong if it brings about more pain than pleasure'.

By adding up the amounts of pleasure and pain for each possible act we should be able to choose the good thing to do. **Happiness = pleasure minus pain**

The Hedonic Calculus

The pursuit of happiness is the fundamental purpose of human life. Bentham stressed the importance of promoting whatever factors led to the increase of pleasure and in suppressing those which produced pain. In chapter 4 of his Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1789), Bentham sketched his idea of the hedonistic calculus. As his theory implied, law should enforce actions and dispose sentences whereby this maximizing of pleasure and minimizing of pain could be most effective. In short, Bentham stated that pleasures and pains, which exist only in individuals, could be constructed into a calculus of value. Hedonic calculus considers seven factors which include: intensity, duration, certainty, remoteness, richness, purity and extent.

1. The **intensity** of the pleasure or pain – this means . . .
2. The **duration** of the pleasure or pain – this means . . .
3. The **certainty** or uncertainty of the pleasure or pain – this means . . .
4. The **remoteness** of any pleasure or pain – this means . . .
5. The chances of the same effects being **repeated**. (**Fecundity/Richness**) – this means . . .
6. The chances of the same effects not being repeated. (**Purity**) – this means . . .
7. The **number** of people who will be affected by any pleasure or pain arising as a result of the action(s) in question. (**Extent**)

Hedonic Calculus made happiness the basis of deciding whether an action should be considered right or wrong. Bentham took the view that following this principle of seeking the happiness of the majority would also benefit the individual who did so, and would itself lead to that individual's greatest happiness.



Bentham believed that everyone has an equal right to happiness, regardless of his or her situation or status in life he argued that everyone counted equally. Therefore the pleasure derived by the flower seller from her weekly bottle of gin was equal to the pleasure derived by the upper class couple who attended the opera.



'The quantity of pleasure being equal, push-pin is as good as poetry.' Bentham

In the **enlightenment** age when science was gaining ground, Bentham offered a way of calculating the happiness afforded by a course of action, and made that the basis of deciding whether that action should be considered right or wrong.

Bentham's Utilitarianism states that actions are judged as a means to an end. What is right is that which is calculated to bring about the greatest balance of good over evil (good is defined as pleasure or happiness). Bentham's view is described as **Act Utilitarianism**.

Bentham argued that we should be guided by the principle of utility and not by rules. However, it may be necessary to use rules of thumb based on past experience, especially if there is not time to work out the consequences.

Original Text

Principles of Morals and Legislation Jeremy Bentham

Chapter 1: The Principle of Utility

1. Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure.

They alone point out what we ought to do and determine what we shall do; the standard of right and wrong, and the chain of causes and effects, are both fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, all we say, all we think; every effort we can make to throw off our subjection to pain and pleasure will only serve to demonstrate and confirm it. A man may claim to reject their rule but in reality he will remain subject to it. The principle of utility recognises this subjection, and makes it the basis of a system that aims to have the edifice of happiness built by the hands of reason and of law. Systems that try to question it deal in sounds instead of sense, in caprice instead of reason, in darkness instead of light.

But enough of metaphor and declamation! It is not by such means that moral science is to be improved.

2. The principle of utility is the foundation of the present work, so I should start by giving an explicit and determinate account of what it is. **By 'the principle of utility' is meant the principle that 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.** I say 'of every action', not only of private individuals but also of governments.

3. **By 'utility' is meant the property of something whereby it tends •to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness** (all equivalent in the present case) or (this being the same thing) •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.

4. 'The interest of the community' is one of the most general expressions in the terminology of morals; no wonder its meaning is often lost! When it has a meaning, it is this. The community is a fictitious body composed of the individuals who are thought of as being as it were its members. Then what is the interest of the community? It is the sum of the interests of the members who compose it.

5. It is pointless to talk of the interest of the community without understanding what the interest of the individual is.

6–7. An action then may be said to conform to the principle of utility. . . . when its **tendency to increase the happiness of the community is greater than any tendency it has to lessen it.** And the same holds for measures of government, which are merely one kind of action performed by one or more particular persons.

8. When someone thinks that an action (especially a measure of government) conforms to the principle of utility, he may find it convenient for purposes of discourse to

- imagine a kind of law or dictate of utility and to
- speak of the action in question as conforming to such a law or dictate.

9. A man may be said to be a 'partisan' of the principle of utility when his approval or disapproval of any action (or governmental measure) is fixed by and proportional to the tendency he thinks it has to increase or to lessen the community's happiness. . . .

10. Of an action that conforms to the principle of utility one may always say that

- it ought to be done, or at least that
- it is not something that ought not to be done.

One may say also that

- it is right that it should be done; it is a right action; or at least that
- it is not wrong that it should be done; it is not a wrong action.

4. Read the information and complete these tasks

a) What did Bentham believe were human's sovereign masters?

b) Explain the principle of utility.

c) How does Bentham define utility and the community?

d) If an action conforms to the principle of utility it should . . .

Chapter 4: Measuring Pleasure and Pain

1. Pleasures and the avoidance of pains, then, are the legislator's goals; so he ought to understand their value. Pleasures and pains are the instruments he has to work with, so he needs to understand their force, i.e. their value.

2. To a person (considered by himself) the value of a pleasure or pain (considered by itself) will be greater or less according to:

(1) its intensity. (2) its duration. (3) its certainty or uncertainty. (4) its nearness or remoteness.

3. These are the circumstances that are to be considered when estimating a pleasure or a pain considered by itself. But when the value of a pleasure or pain is considered for the purpose of estimating the tendency of an act by which it is produced, two other circumstances must be taken in to the account:

(5) its fecundity, i.e. its chance of being followed by sensations of the same kind (pleasure by pleasure, pain by pain), and **(6) its purity**, i.e. its chance of not being followed by sensations of the opposite kind (pleasure by pain, pain by pleasure).

These last two, however, are not strictly properties of the pleasure or the pain itself, so they aren't strictly to be taken into the account of the value of that pleasure or pain. They are really only properties of the act or other event by which such pleasure or pain has been produced; so they are only to be taken into the account of the tendency of that act or event.

4. For many people the value of a pleasure or a pain will be greater or less according to seven circumstances—the six preceding ones and one other, namely

(7) its extent, i.e. the number of persons to whom it extends or (in other words) who are affected by it.

5. Thus, to take an exact account of an act's general tendency to affect the interests of a community, proceed as follows. Of those whose interests seem to be most immediately affected by the act, take one, and take an account,

(1) of the value of each pleasure that appears to be produced by it in the first instance;

(2) of the value of each pain that appears to be produced by it in the first instance;

(3) of the value of each pleasure that appears to be produced by it after the first, this being the fecundity of the first pleasure and the impurity of the first pain;

(4) of the value of each pain that appears to be produced by it after the first, this being the fecundity of the first pain and the impurity of the first pleasure. Then

(5) Sum up the values of all the pleasures on one side and of all the pains on the other. If the balance is on the side of pleasure, that is the over-all good tendency of the act with respect to the interests of that person; if on the side of pain, its over-all bad tendency. (6) Repeat the above process with respect to each person whose interests appear to be concerned; and then sum the results. If this balance is on the

side of pleasure, that is the over-all good tendency of the act with respect to the interests of the community; if on the side of pain, its over-all bad tendency.

6. It is not to be expected that this process should be strictly pursued before every moral judgment or every legislative or judicial operation. But it can be always kept in view; and the nearer the process actually pursued on these occasions come to it, the nearer they will come to exactness.

7. This process is applicable to pleasure and pain in whatever form they appear, and by whatever name they are labelled: to pleasure, whether it be called 'good' (that is properly the cause or instrument of pleasure) or profit (that is distant pleasure, or the cause or instrument of distant pleasure) or 'convenience' or 'advantage', 'benefit', 'emolument', 'happiness', and so forth; to pain, whether it is called 'evil' (that corresponds to 'good') or 'mischief' or 'inconvenience' or 'disadvantage' or 'loss' or 'unhappiness', and so forth.

8. This is not a novel and unjustified theory, any more than it is a useless one. What it presents is nothing but what perfectly fits the practice of mankind whenever they have a clear view of their own interest. What makes (for instance) an article of property, an estate in land, valuable? The pleasures of all kinds that it enables a man to produce, and (the same thing) the pains of all kinds that it enables him to avert. But everyone takes the value of such an article of property to rise or fall according to •how long a man has it, •how certain it is that he will get it, and •how long it will be before he gets it if indeed he does. The intensity of the pleasures he may derive from it is never thought of, because that depends on how he in particular chooses to use it, which can't be estimated till the particular pleasures he may derive from it or the particular pains he may exclude by means of it are brought to view. For the same reason, he doesn't think, either, of the fecundity or purity of those pleasures. So much for pleasure and pain, happiness and unhappiness, in general.

5. Read the information and complete these tasks

- a) What are the circumstances that are to be considered when estimating a pleasure or a pain considered by itself?

- b) What other two other circumstances must be taken in to the account?

- c) What does Bentham mean by the extent?

- d) Briefly summarise the moral decision making process as described by Bentham.

- e) Explain what Bentham means by pleasure and pain

Act Utilitarianism: a form of Utilitarianism associated with Bentham that treats each moral situation as unique and applies the hedonic calculus to each 'act' to see if it fulfils the 'principle of utility'. Any action is right if it produces the 'greatest happiness for the greatest number'

It is a consequentialist theory because . . .

6. Act Utilitarianism

Complete each box

Although Bentham is said to be an act utilitarian, he did not claim that it was necessary to calculate the rightness and wrongness of every act from the hedonic calculus, just that this was generally the case.

It is a relativist theory because . . .

7. An example of the application of the hedonic calculus 1

8. Write it up as a paragraph to use in your essays.

‘Suppose you are a doctor driving to one of your patients, a young mother about to give birth. However, she is in great pain and difficulty and it looks as though she will need a Caesarean section. It is late at night and you come across a car accident down a country road. Two cars are involved and both drivers are injured and unconscious. You discover through trying to establish identities that one of them is the young pregnant woman’s husband. The other is an elderly man. You don’t quite know the extent of the internal injuries are of the opinion that without immediate medical help one of them if not both may die. You are faced now with the moral dilemma of who to help first:

- The young mother about to give birth?
- The young woman’s husband?
- The elderly gentleman?’ Extract from Vardy and Grosch The Puzzle of Ethics

Hedonic Calculus Criteria	Young mother	Young woman’s husband	Elderly gentleman

Act Utilitarianism – summary and evaluation

You look at an action to determine what is moral, and from this general rules can be derived. E.g. when faced with a road traffic accident a paramedic will treat a pregnant woman first. This is because in any given situation, the pregnant woman and her unborn child have a greater potential for future happiness than any individual involved in the crash. By deciding how to act in a specific case, the general rule 'Always treat a pregnant woman first' can be derived. This rule is only a guideline, and should be discarded if doing so will bring about more happiness (e.g. if a brain surgeon is in need of treatment).

A big criticism of Act Utilitarianism is that it is impossible to make the sorts of calculations it requires, although Bentham talked of a 'rule of thumb' which meant that you could repeat a previous decision under similar circumstances. Another is that people need rules - if you allow people to lie, steal etc. this could become too great a temptation e.g. to lie to avoid looking bad rather than because it genuinely brought better consequences.

On the plus side, it has most integrity, as it allows you to stick with the greatest happiness principle unswervingly – simply do whatever brings the most happiness in any given situation.

9. Why might the fact that we aren't always able to predict the future be a problem for utilitarianism? Give an example.

10. Suggest examples of pains that are good and pleasures that are bad. How do these cause difficulties for utilitarianism?

11. Are affection and honesty good in themselves, or only because they have good results?

Weaknesses of Act Utilitarianism

- ✓ It is difficult to predict consequences
- ✓ There is potential to justify any act
- ✓ There is difficulty in defining pleasure
- ✓ There is no defence for the minorities
- ✓ It is impractical to say that we should calculate the morality of each choice

12. Write 3 paragraphs to explain the problems with Bentham's Act Utilitarianism. Use 67-68 of V and G and the Walker article.

1. Quantitative

2. Predictive value

3. What counts as pleasure

John Stuart Mill: Rule Utilitarianism

Mill was also a **hedonist** and accepted that happiness is of great importance. He stressed happiness rather than pleasure. Mill argued that not all forms of happiness or pleasure were of equal value. He argued that Bentham's approach did not recognise higher human values, he saw the advantages of a utilitarian system, but advocated the quality of happiness as more important: 'If he (Bentham) thought at all about the higher values of human nature, it was but as idiosyncrasies of taste.' In Mill's view the flower seller should be educated to enjoy the opera rather than her bottle of gin (remember the example!).

Mill argued that human beings should seek to fulfil their highest potential and not stoop to the level of non-human animals: ***'Better Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied; better a man dissatisfied than a pig satisfied.'***



According to Mill, quality of pleasure employs the use of the higher faculties. For Mill, it is intellectual pleasures (e.g. reading, poetry or listening to music) that really count and are more important than such pleasures as eating, drinking or having sex.

13. Explain, with examples what Mill means by Higher and Lower pleasures.

Higher pleasures

Lower pleasures

14. How might it be possible to distinguish between higher and lower pleasures? Competent judges

Happiness, he argues, is something that people desire for its own sake, but we need to look at human life as whole- happiness is not just adding up the units of pleasure but rather the fulfilment of higher ideals. Therefore his theory is **qualitative**.

Mill believed that there are principles that work as a general means for securing the greater good. A popular example is that of lying. While there may be good reasons for lying in specific circumstances, as an overall principle lying cannot be supported because it cannot support the greatest good for the greatest number. For example 'it is wrong to lie' Mill noted that there is some benefit to this maxim- without it people would find it hard to trust each other. He therefore proposed a rule that contributes to the greater happiness. Breaking the rule might contribute to an individual's short-term happiness, but is detrimental to long-term happiness for all concerned. Mill wanted to show what was right or wrong for one person in a situation is right and wrong for all. He argued that:

1. Happiness is desirable since we all desire it
2. Happiness is the only thing desirable as an end, since things are only desirable because they bring about happiness.
3. Therefore, everyone ought to aim at the happiness of everyone, as increasing the general happiness will increase my happiness.

This argument support the idea that people should put the interests of the group before their own interests. Bentham's principle of utility had focused much more on individual situations and had not concept of protecting the common good universally. However, it is always the identification of the greatest happiness in terms of quality that drives this decision. In essence, as society is made up of individuals, for society to be happy, individuals need to be happy also. It is therefore the 'duty' or 'rule' for society that it should protect the happiness of its subjects.

In summary Mill's revision of utilitarianism allows for the formulation of rules based on utilitarian principles. These rules promote the happiness of the greatest number, and can be used in making ethical decisions. It is therefore called **rule utilitarianism**.

Mill also positively developed Bentham's approach by the introduction of the **harm principle**, which states that the majority may not interfere with the minority unless it is to prevent harm to others. This principle could allow for a whole society to be provided with happiness rather than a large number benefiting from a small number of citizens.

15. Why is the 'harm principle' so important for Rule Utilitarianism?

Development of Rule Utilitarianism

Mill thought previous experiences did help us make decisions. Humans have already developed some general principles that are universal in nature, and if applied to any situation, they would lead to the greatest happiness for the greatest number. From these, certain actions will be ruled out as unacceptable. The principle of utility is therefore applied to a rule, so the rule will hold if *in general* following it leads to greater happiness. This means that in an individual case, even though an injustice might bring about greater happiness, if it goes against the general principle that injustice tends to lead to misery and a reduction in happiness, it is deemed wrong. In Rule Utilitarianism, moral actions are those which conform to the rules that lead to the greatest good. For example, we do not need to use the hedonic calculus to work out that giving money to the poor is right because it is a well-worked rule of Utilitarianism.

Bentham is generally seen as an Act Utilitarian, as the Greatest Happiness Principle seems to demand. As we saw, he is open to the criticism that Utilitarianism goes against justice and human rights, as it allows abuses of rights if they bring enough happiness. Mill may be seen as a Rule Utilitarian, as he clearly thinks certain rules have a Utilitarian justification. In his book 'Utilitarianism', Mill defends the idea of rights:

"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."

Ultimately, Mill would break a rule if breaking it leads to the greatest happiness. Elsewhere in the book, Mill says:

"...to save a life, it may not only be allowable, but a duty, to steal, or take by force, the necessary food or medicine, or to kidnap, and compel to officiate, the only qualified medical practitioner."

Mill has been described as a 'soft' or weak Rule Utilitarian; 'Hard' or strong Rule Utilitarians would disagree with breaking a rule even if doing so led to the greater good. Many criticise 'soft' Rule Utilitarians, saying that this is effectively the same as Act Utilitarianism.

Mill strongly believed that the individual is sovereign over himself, which is an unusual principle for a Utilitarian! This means that, for example, we should allow people to smoke in private (banning smoking is an attack on the individual's sovereignty) even though smoking leads to terrible illness etc. Mill's belief in individual sovereignty could be justified by a Rule Utilitarian (can you explain how?)

Mill's theory is often seen as a deontological and teleological hybrid; that is, it is a mixture of the application of rules that have been established through the experience of applying Utilitarianism, but also at times through the consideration of the end goal of his specific form of Utilitarianism without reference to past experience.

Strong and Weak Rule Utilitarianism

The **strong** form of the theory maintains that rules established through the application of **utilitarian principles should never be broken**.

The **weak** version tries to allow for the possibility that those same utilitarian principles can take precedence in a particular situation over a general rule. However, the rule would still form part of the decision-making process.

Weak rule utilitarianism accepts the need to be **flexible** over the implementation of the rule of utility. **The rule would still need to be taken into account.**

15. Write definitions and examples of strong and weak rule utilitarianism.

Strong _____

Weak _____

Utilitarianism Essay

Some Ideas

Explain Bentham's hedonic calculus as a means of measuring pleasure. [20]

- Introduction – What is Utilitarianism? (Give brief overview – Relative, Teleological and secular approach), based on the Principle of Utility – the avoidance of pain and the promotion of pleasure/happiness. Its aim is that the moral agent decides what is the 'greatest good for the greatest number' in their situation. Refer to Bentham and Mill as the key early proponents of this theory.
- Describe Bentham's theory: pleasure based.
- Hedonic Calculus – go through it and give examples of how it might work – or you might want to choose and ethical issue and go through each element of the calculus applying the condition to the issue.
- Talk about the fact that the Hedonic Calculus allows us to make a quantitative decision about the greatest good for the greatest number.
- You may also wish to refer to the fact that Bentham's approach is called Act Utilitarianism and as such the hedonic calculus helps make decisions in every situation because there are not any rules to follow.

'Rule utilitarianism works better as an ethic than Act Utilitarianism.' Evaluate this view. [30]

Rule Utilitarianism Works better	Act Utilitarianism works better
1. It provides rules which people can follow, therefore giving definitive guidance. This is surely what ethics should be about.	This is a better approach because it encourages moral autonomy. People are encouraged to think for themselves and to make decisions for themselves. This also ensures that they are completely morally responsible for their actions.
2. It works better because it promotes equality. Everyone is following the same general principles and therefore this avoids situations being dealt with unfairly.	It can be argued that this approach is much more compassionate and flexible. Instead of being bound by rules, the moral agent is able to make decisions that take into account the preferences and needs of others.
3. Rule Utilitarianism works better because if we don't have rules then people are left to decide for themselves how to act. This is a problem as people might make mistakes or may make selfish decisions	You can also argue that Act Utilitarianism is better than its counterpart as it can never be outdated and can be applied to new dilemmas. Followers of rule utilitarianism – in particular strong rule, may feel that they are stuck in a rut of always following the same rules which may be in need of modification.

3 F Application of Situation Ethics to animal experimentation for medical research and the use of nuclear weapons as a form of deterrent.

	The Greatest Good for the Greatest number	Bentham and The Hedonic Calculus	Mill and the Higher/Lower pleasures and the don't harm principle	Overall	Do you agree?
Animal Experimentation	<p>Within Utilitarianism there is the key principle that the good thing is that which brings the greatest happiness for the greatest number.</p> <p>Jeremy Bentham famously said that 'rights are nonsense on stilts' and one might assume that the same is true of animals- except that he commented "but a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of one day or a week, or even a month old. But suppose they were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, can they reason? Nor can they talk? But can they suffer?"</p> <p>Bentham means that everyone has a right to pleasure and a right to avoid suffering. This applies to</p>	<p>Bentham would not approve of any action that would cause pain and suffering, especially if that pain and suffering were more than any pleasure provided to the majority.</p> <p>He would be concerned about certainty – how certain are we that animal testing will bring about a cure for humans.</p> <p>He would be concerned about the duration of the pain and suffering caused to an animal.</p> <p>He would be most concerned about whether the pain for the animal is outweighed by the curing of many humans through experimentation.</p>	<p>It is highly likely that animal experimentation would be considered a higher pleasure as it is in the form of scientific research.</p> <p>Mill would be concerned with whether the act of experimenting on animals should be considered to promote the greatest happiness for the majority.</p> <p>Mill's "Don't harm principle" is a social contract between consenting adults and would not apply to animals.</p>	<p>Utilitarianism is a secular theory which would not consider the sanctity of life from a religious perspective. However, many modern utilitarians, including Peter Singer would argue that humans need to be wary of being speciesist.</p> <p>This theory is relative and teleological and would be driven by the consequences, and if the pain and suffering of a hundred animals led to the salvation of thousands of humans it would be morally acceptable.</p>	

	everything in creation.				
Nuclear Weapons as a form of Deterrent	<p>The question here is – do nuclear weapons as a form of nuclear deterrent work and successfully create the greatest good for the greatest number?</p> <p>Overall, this is hard to discern as many countries do have nuclear weapons and so it is hard to judge how secure a country would be without them.</p> <p>A Utilitarian undoubtedly will have issues with weapons of Mass Destruction because by their very nature they threaten such huge numbers of people.</p>	<p>Bentham would not approve of any action that would cause pain and suffering, especially if that pain and suffering were more than any pleasure provided to the majority. Nuclear War would mean the annihilation of thousands of people, for generations and as such the pain and suffering may be considered to be too high.</p> <p>He would be concerned about certainty – how certain are we that nuclear weapons are the most efficient deterrent? How certain are we that they will bring about pleasure and avoid pain?</p> <p>He would be concerned about the duration of the pain and suffering caused to creation if nuclear weapons were used as more than just a deterrent.</p>	<p>Mill would undoubtedly be concerned that nuclear weapons as a deterrent can be argued to bring happiness to the greatest number – if they mean that we always avoid war as a result of having them.</p> <p>However, he would seriously question the use of having such weapons as they bring about immense pain and suffering for a large group of people and as such cannot be considered to be morally good.</p> <p>His theory is also a form of weak rule utilitarianism and it could be easily said that the avoidance of war could be a weak rule leading to happiness.</p> <p>Mill’s “Don’t harm principle” is a social contract between consenting adults and would certainly apply to us not using nuclear weapons. It seems logical to suggest that Mill would consider multi-lateral disarmament to be a better prospect.</p>	<p>Utilitarianism is a secular theory which would not consider the sanctity of life from a religious perspective.</p> <p>However, many modern utilitarians, would argue that nuclear weapons pose such a great threat to society and to the majority of people that they are unnecessary.</p> <p>This theory is relative and teleological and would be driven by the consequences, and if the pain and suffering of hundreds of people yet led to the salvation of thousands of humans it would be morally acceptable to keep weapons of mass destruction as a form of deterrent.</p>	

Nuclear Weapons and Deterrence with reference to Utilitarianism

http://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles_papers_reports/766

It is first important to understand the concept of nuclear deterrence and why it is a pressing ethical issue. Deterrence is a psychological phenomenon. It involves convincing an aggressor not to attack by threatening it with harmful retaliation. A psychological dimension is involved because the success of deterrence is not due solely to the retaliators capability, but to how persuasive the message of the threat is. In other words, in order for deterrence to work, the opponent must perceive the retaliatory threat as legitimate and serious (Morgan, 1985, p. 125).

John Stuart Mills' idea of utilitarianism provides an interesting framework from which this issue can be approached. [Utilitarianism claims that](#), "the aim of action should be the largest possible balance of pleasure over pain or the greatest happiness of the greatest number. "Therefore, the fundamental basis of this principle is that agents, in this case military strategists, should strive to produce the greatest amount of long-term satisfaction or pleasure for people as possible.

One key component of this principle that is highly relevant to nuclear deterrence is *uncertainty*. When consequences of actions are not known for certain, one should choose whichever action has the greatest *expected* utility. This is known as the Expected Utility Principle (Oyshile, 2008, p.65).

The problem with this is that it is nearly impossible to calculate a quantitative outcome by comparing deterrence with disarmament. This is because it is hard to calculate the probability of what action the opponent is going to choose. If the opponent is convinced by the threat of retaliation, than nuclear deterrence is successful and maximum utility is achieved. But what if the aggressor is not persuaded by the principle and chooses to attack anyway? Here a problem arises. Is it better to retaliate as forewarned to save the most lives, or continue to be attacked and avoid an immoral act?

When attempting to apply this to nuclear warfare, it initially seemed impossible. Remember, the two options being compared are nuclear deterrence and unilateral disarmament. It seems here that the worst outcomes for both options are the extinction of all humans on earth. For example, in both cases the rival country could continue to attack or other nations that possess nuclear weapons could get involved. In its most extreme form it is plausible that severe nuclear warfare could end the world. Though, it should be noted that the probability of this occurring in the case of disarmament is extremely low.

Though both concepts discussed aim to base ethical decision-making on the best or greatest outcome, neither discusses the inherent goodness of nuclear deterrence itself. Here it is useful to incorporate yet another branch of philosophy: deontology. Deontology focuses on the rightness or wrongness of the action, not on the rightness or wrongness of the consequences (Johnson, 1998, p. 15). From this framework, one could argue that it is intrinsically wrong to put other human beings, especially innocent human beings, at risk. Therefore, since the strategy of nuclear deterrence puts innocent lives in both the opponent and retaliatory countries at risk, then it too is intrinsically wrong.

Though these arguments against nuclear deterrence make sense within each framework, one must also view the issue from a worldly and militaristic standpoint. As stated in the clip from the Carnegie Council titled, "[Are Nuclear Weapons Useful?](#)" nuclear technology cannot be "disinvented." Even if a country possesses nuclear weapons, but is against using them, there is nothing preventing aggressor nations with the same technological capabilities from using them. If it became a reality that the United States was victim of a nuclear attack, would leaders refuse to retaliate or stand up for the country (through

deterrence), just to sustain moral beliefs? Although in theory nuclear deterrence may be immoral, in its real world application it might be unavoidable in extreme circumstances.

Another option—perhaps with more real-world applicability—is bilateral disarmament, or agreement from both nations to retreat. On the brink of nuclear war, if bilateral disarmament were achieved, then nuclear deterrence and unilateral disarmament could be avoided, and it could be the responsibility of a neutral third party such as the United Nations to intervene if a situation like this were to actually occur. This would help to lessen any deceptive strategies on both sides.

Nuclear deterrence in itself can be viewed as an immoral act on the grounds that it is putting the lives of innocent civilians at stake. Further, disarmament can be seen as the moral alternative to deterrence because the worst possible outcome is less catastrophic than if deterrence proved unsuccessful and the retaliating country is forced to attack.

Though these conclusions all make sense theoretically, I personally question how applicable they are in real-world circumstances. And though that doesn't mean that it has to be used, it does mean that other countries with less than altruistic motives are able to access it.

Though bilateral disarmament is probably the best solution, what if a nuclear threat arises against the United States where the opposing country refuses to disarm? Are military personnel expected to disarm knowing that the other country won't? Or, are they expected to deter: a risk that if successful has the potential to save millions of lives? Decisions regarding nuclear weapons have enormous effects on the well-being of all humans. A wrong decision could lead to extinction. By continuing to view this issue from various perspectives and educating world leaders, the human race can hopefully come a bit closer to finding an answer for this difficult ethical issue.

Theme 3: Teleological Ethics

Evaluating Utilitarianism A)2



Issues for analysis and evaluation will be drawn from any aspect of the content above, such as:

- The degree to which pleasure can be seen as the sole intrinsic good.
- The extent to which Act and/or Rule Utilitarianism works in contemporary society.
- The extent to which Rule Utilitarianism provides a better basis for making moral decisions than Act Utilitarianism.
- Whether Utilitarianism promotes immoral behaviour.
- The extent to which Utilitarianism promotes justice.
- The extent to which Utilitarianism provides a practical basis for making moral decisions for both religious believers and non-believers.

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Type of theory</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>

AO2 Prep - An attempt to show the problems of utilitarianism

8. An example of the application of the hedonic calculus 2

'Jim finds himself in the central square of a small South American town. Tied up against the wall are a row of several Indians (native Americans), mostly terrified, a few defiant, in front of them several armed men in uniform. A heavy man in a sweat-stained khaki shirt turns out to be the captain in charge and, after a good deal of questioning of Jim which establishes that he got there by accident while on a botanical expedition, explains that the Indians are a random group of the inhabitants who, after recent acts of protest against the government, are just about to be killed to remind other possible protestors of the advantages of not protesting. However, since Jim is an honoured visitor from another land, the captain is happy to offer him a guest's privilege of killing one of the Indians himself. If Jim accepts, then as a mark of the special occasion, the other Indians will be let off. Of course, if Jim refuses, then there is no special occasion, and Pedro here will do what he was about to do when Jim arrived, and kill them all. Jim, with some recollection of school boy fiction, wonders whether if he got hold of the gun, he could hold the Captain and the rest of the soldiers to threat, but it is quite clear from the set-up that nothing of that kind is going to work: any attempt at that sort of thing will mean that all the Indians will be killed and himself. The men against the wall, and the other villagers, understand the situation, and are obviously begging him to accept. What should he do?' Bernard Williams *Utilitarianism: For and against* 1973

Hedonic Calculus Criteria	Accept	Don't accept

Summary of arguments

Strengths

1. It supports the view that human well-being is intrinsically good and actions should be judged according to their effect on this well-being
2. Supports the teaching of Jesus: 'Do to others as you would have them do to you' Matt 7:12
3. A person's motives may be good or bad, but only consequences have any real effect
4. Act Utilitarianism is pragmatic
5. The principle encourages democracy. The interests of the majority are paramount.
6. The theory treats everyone the same, no one gets special treatment due to their emotional or social attachments
7. Circumstances can be judged without reference to previous ones
8. It is an approach that does not rely on controversial or unverifiable religious principles
9. It appears to be simple to follow 'greatest happiness for the greatest number'

Weaknesses

1. The theory requires people to predict the long term consequences of an action. However, there is not guarantee that circumstances will turn out exactly as predicted.
2. Not every action done out of good will is going to result in good consequences
3. The concept of happiness changes from person to person
4. It does not allow for someone doing what they believe to be morally right whatever the consequences
5. The theory cannot be used to decide what is universally good
6. The majority is not always right
7. The theory is too simplistic and can lead to injustice
8. The rights of the individual or group can be ignored if it is not in the interests of the majority – even if their claim is fair and just
9. It makes no allowances for personal relationships – we have duties and obligations towards others 'In practice, none of us is willing to treat all people as equals, for it would require that we abandon our special relationships with friends and family.' Rachels
10. People may not be motivated by pleasure and happiness. They may be willing to endure pain, humiliation or self-sacrifice for a cause they believe to be right
11. The Hedonic Calculus is impractical – it cannot cope with emergency situations

Read the sample answers and complete the essays below.

Add scholars

Add examples

Add a conclusion

The degree to which pleasure can be seen as the sole intrinsic good

The main issue here is with the vagueness of 'pleasure' and its subjective nature. For example, not everyone may have the same amount of pleasure from the same experience. However, Bentham would argue that if we use the hedonic calculus correctly then this would be accounted for; one person would not choose a scary ride at a theme park but another person would choose it because it was 'thrilling' and not 'scary'.

The most obvious challenge to the idea of pleasure as the sole intrinsic good is once again linked to the idea of subjectivity. Just because a pleasure may produce happiness does that mean it is the same as 'good' in terms of ethics?

The idea of pursuing happiness as a goal has been called into question. Mill later developed Bentham's system and refined the definition of pleasure and 'happiness' into a nobler idea more akin to Aristotle's eudaimonia. Some would argue that the pursuit of eudaimonia is superior because it embraces a more holistic view of an individual's overall well-being.

There are surely some pleasures that are nobler than others. Although Bentham's calculus goes some way towards identifying these through the applications of key principles, it is still left to individual interpretation of these. For example, some may see spiritual and intellectual happiness as superior to sensual satisfaction whilst others may disagree.

However, it is clear that pleasures that produce happiness are vital for complete mental health and quality of life, although one could argue that there is an obsessive compulsion to seek out constant pleasure that may be implicit in the hedonic calculus. Some would argue that life is better as a 'roller coaster' as the ups and downs help us learn and grow as individuals. Indeed, does not the extent of the pleasure grow when we know what pain is? However, despite this it is clear to many that life is to be enjoyed and not 'suffered' and all noble religious and non-religious ideals seek some form of individual satisfaction.

The real question seems to be 'is happiness or pleasure a valid aim?' when compared to more spiritual goals such as salvation. The problem also is that there is no capacity for self-sacrifice or discipline in the ideal of pleasure as the sole intrinsic good. Sometimes we cannot compute what impact an experience may have and can have the tendency to not see how good something may be because it appears too difficult or uncomfortable for us. Are there not instances where pain is good for you? What about pains associated with hard work or exercise?

In conclusion it appears that the answer depends upon the nature of the happiness involved in relation to the pleasure and in Bentham's calculus maybe there ought to be some priority, say for example, the extent and fecundity which have more chance of including more than one person. This leaves us with the lingering doubt that pleasure as the sole intrinsic good does seem rather self-indulgent.

1. The degree to which pleasure can be seen as the sole intrinsic good.

Pleasure is the sole good	Pleasure is not the sole good	Evaluation
Pleasure is important to many people and can be measured HC	Pleasure is subjective	
Not selfish –for community	Minority can suffer	
Life is to be enjoyed – pleasure is good for mental health	Some pain is necessary	
Compatible with Christianity	Love and a relationship with God is more important	
Concept of higher and lower pleasure – link to Aristotle and the noble pursuit of Eudaimonia	Not everyone would agree which pleasures are more important	

Conclusion

The extent to which Utilitarianism works in contemporary society

Many people would see the fact that Utilitarianism as a teleological theory aims for the goal of happiness as being realistic as this is what many people claim is their aim in life and for society as a whole in providing 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number'.

Whilst Act Utilitarianism does have a number of weaknesses, the fact that it forms the basis of modern political democracy shows that it must still be useful in contemporary society. Utilitarianism has aims that are attractive in that happiness is desired and the avoidance of pain seem reasonable goals. It does seem that we are motivated by pleasure and motivated to avoid pain. It also seems straightforward to apply to most situations and concurs with common sense. For example, it takes into account consequences of our actions, whereas simply looking at intentions with no regard to their consequences seems impersonal. This is important in establishing social laws.

Utilitarianism also considers others and not just the individual. It is concerned with the common good. It takes into account all who are affected by the action. In short, Act Utilitarianism is pragmatic and concentrates on the situation a person is in and the effects of an action. In addition, another strength of the theory is that it treats everyone the same and no individual gets special treatment. This is consistent with the ideals of contemporary society.

Overall, Utilitarianism allows people the autonomy to make decisions for themselves; for example, in Act Utilitarianism each act is considered individually so it is not prescriptive and restrictive. Ultimately, for many people 'happiness' is an important aspect of decision making as it is their main aim in life and Utilitarianism can provide a clear guidance on what leads to the 'greatest happiness for the greatest number'.

However, Utilitarianism does have a number of key weaknesses as an ethical theory. Although it is essentially concerned with fulfilling the 'greatest happiness for the greatest number' it can, as a result, allow a minority to suffer, for example, leading to the justification of acts such as slavery or torture. This would not be allowed in contemporary society.

It seems to ignore intentions and an individual's motive which conveys that the means by which the greatest good is achieved seems incidental and of no moral relevance. In other words, injustice could be seen as right action, which seems contrary to common sense. Justice is the foundation of contemporary society.

In deciding whether an action is morally right, it requires the outcomes of the action to be known. However, outcomes may not be accurately predictable. This is certainly true in the case of a war. It is also true with some forms of genetic engineering. To decide what action will produce the greatest good, the alternative actions also have to be considered and their possible outcomes predicted. This seems an impossible task. In this way one could argue that Utilitarianism seems too demanding, since we ought always to do that which gives greatest good for the greatest number, but there may always be an act, other than what we choose, that would give greater good.

Another criticism of Utilitarianism fails to consider that we have certain duties or obligations towards others; for example, a mother's duty to protect her child. This is part of human nature and another aspect to this is that people are not infallible and they often can make errors of judgement, specifically in relation to what they think will lead to happiness may not in the end produce it.

ere is also the argument that it cannot really be applied consistently: happiness is subjective and people have different ideas about what constitutes 'pleasure'. What is one person's pleasure is another person's idea of pain. How would this work in society?

ially, a religious believer would argue that the rules for society should be based on God's will not on the pursuit of happiness. Indeed, they would indicate that some of the rules of society are not consistent with the pursuit of an individual's pleasure or 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number'.

In conclusion, it can be seen that aspects of utilitarian theory do work in society but it is clear that using it as a basis for all our laws would be questionable.

2. The extent to which Act and/or Rule Utilitarianism works in contemporary society.

They work in contemporary society	They do not work in contemporary society	Evaluation
Pragmatic and realistic	Lack of absolutes	
Encourages democracy	Minority could suffer	
Flexible	Happiness is subjective	
Consequences	Can't predict consequences	
Advantages of HC	Disadvantages of HC Doesn't value good motives	
Higher and Lower pleasures	Competent Judges	

The extent to which Rule Utilitarianism provides a better basis for making moral decisions than Act Utilitarianism

In terms of Bentham's Act Utilitarianism, a great strength is that it has a clear method in its application of the hedonic calculus. Indeed, one could go as far as to argue that the hedonic calculus is thorough in its consideration of measuring aspects of pleasure. Act Utilitarianism is also a morally democratic approach that seeks the fairest result through application of the happiness principle.

There are, however, specific weaknesses of Bentham and Act Utilitarianism. Firstly, it is not clear how the hedonic calculus resolves the problem of assessing the quantity of pleasure. For instance, how is it possible to quantify and compare intensity of pleasure with duration of pleasure? Listing elements of pleasure does not resolve the problem of quantifying the pleasure. Secondly, the hedonic calculus does not prioritise or rank aspects of pleasure and so can lead to further confusion. If applied clumsily the hedonic calculus is open to abuse; for example, it appears to justify gang rape. Finally, Bentham's hedonic calculus criteria seem to be geared towards the individual in its application, that is, more to the principle of utility in general, rather than a consideration of its wider implications of the happiness principle advocated by Utilitarianism.

Mills Rule Utilitarianism has specific strengths, the first of which is that it is arguably a more intelligent and thoughtful approach than Bentham's theory. It clearly addresses the quantitative aspect of pleasure by qualifying it and refining it with the qualitative analysis. Some would therefore say that it avoids the pitfalls of Bentham's basic calculus and comes across as a more refined and nobler system of thought.

However, was Mill right when he argued that higher pleasures are better than lower pleasures? Who is it that decides this? In addition, with the introduction of new variables it could be argued to be too complex a system to calculate and therefore due to its complexity be of no practical use.

Nonetheless, Rule Utilitarianism has the great strength of being directed in the main at society and has a basis of tried and tested experiences on which to act, and not, as in the case of Act Utilitarianism, advocating an unpredictable fresh calculation for each decision. This is useful to help people and guide them rather than to over complicate the theory and confuse people. In Mill's harm principle we appear to be working towards safeguarding against the possibly inconsistencies that Act Utilitarianism could potentially create.

In conclusion, I suppose it all depends upon what the theory is being used for. It would appear that Act Utilitarianism is more pertinent to the individual and allows for more freedom in application whereas Strong Rule Utilitarianism could be seen as possibly too inflexible for society as a whole and not accounting for that freedom. Maybe a happy compromise is to say that overall, a Weak Rule is the most superior approach to ethics because it does allow the individuality of Act Utilitarianism and the guidance of Rule Utilitarianism?

3. The extent to which Rule Utilitarianism provides a better basis for making moral decisions than Act Utilitarianism.

Problems with Act Utilitarianism

Strengths of Mill's Rule Utilitarianism

Problems with Mill's Rule Utilitarianism

Conclusion

Whether Utilitarianism promotes immoral behaviour

There is a great deal of emphasis on principles of reason and individual judgements. This is where the main criticisms of Utilitarianism arise and opens it up to accusations of immoral behaviour.

Religious believers, on the whole, would argue that God's rule and teachings are universally applicable, objective and ensure overall justice. This is more reliable than a secular theory developed by humans and applied inconsistently. The latter will only lead inevitably to instances of immoral behaviour.

Another line of argument would be that, according to Utilitarianism, happiness is subjective and that two similar situations could be treated differently as people have different ideas of what happiness is. This could lead to injustice for those involved.

Despite this, however, Utilitarianism, especially that proposed by Mill, is based on a democratic and fair philosophy as it promotes the 'greatest happiness for the greatest number' and Mill's harm principle defends against misuse and immorality. Indeed, even with Bentham's proposals, if the hedonic calculus is used and considered as a whole, it ensures that everyone's happiness is considered when making an ethical decision. In this sense it promotes justice and not immoral behaviour. Indeed, in considering the consequences of each action, Utilitarianism makes people consider how their actions affect others and is another safeguard against immoral actions.

Another challenge to the statement would be that Act Utilitarianism takes the situation into account when making an ethical decision and therefore is more just than absolutist theories, which simply prevent people from performing certain actions. The danger with absolute systems is that they could, according to Arthur Miller, promote the 'the immorality of morality'.

In this way the use of the hedonic calculus ensures that everyone's happiness is considered when making an ethical decision, so it is just. In Weak Rule Utilitarianism, for example, the rules that have been formulated ensure that similar actions are treated in the same way, for example do not lie, but are also considered with the flexibility that legalism or Strong Rule Utilitarianism cannot offer.

Act Utilitarianism, however, can be accused of allowing a minority to suffer as long as the majority are happy. It could justify acts such as the torture or death of an innocent person as long as it fulfilled 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number'. Ultimately, it allows many people put their own happiness before the happiness of others so this will lead to injustice. It is in the very nature of Utilitarianism as a consequentialist theory the intended outcome is not guaranteed and so people may end up being treated unfairly.

In conclusion, it is not the case that any particular system of ethical theory ever intends immoral behaviour or promotes it for that matter. Even religious systems can be accused of immorality in practice, for instance intolerance and discrimination but it would be wrong to say that this was intended or promoted. It is how they are applied that matters and it is this application, possibly unwisely, that appears to be the root of immorality and not the theory itself.

4. Whether Utilitarianism promotes immoral behaviour.

Agree – it promotes immoral behaviour/injustice	Disagree – it does not promote immoral behaviour/ injustice	Evaluation
Rejects moral absolutes that are essential for morality e.g. Christian teachings	Flexible and situational (Act)	
Happiness is subjective therefore . . .	HC – takes into account everyone’s happiness -	
Minority suffering e.g.	Fair and democratic	
Outcome not guaranteed	Consequentialist – considers impact	
Problems with Rule Utilitarianism	Strengths of Rule Utilitarianism	

Conclusion

The extent to which Utilitarianism promotes justice

We have seen that as a political economist, civil servant and Member of Parliament, Mill was very interested in social reform and looking at how society worked and what was best for people in general. Mill wanted to show that what is right or wrong for one person in a situation is right or wrong for all and this has major implications for society and social justice.

Mill argued that people should put the interests of the group before their own interests. He pointed out that as society is made up of individuals, for society to be happy, individuals collectively need to be happy also. It is therefore the 'duty' or 'rule' for society that it should protect the happiness of its subjects and maintain justice throughout.

Mill also introduced his 'harm principle' based upon the principle of protection. In his book *On Liberty* Mill wrote, 'That principle is ... that the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community against his will, is to prevent harm to others.' He further stated, 'The only part of the conduct of anyone, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others.' This clearly gives Utilitarianism its focus of justice for society as a whole and not just the individual. This then has been clearly established.

However, there is a potential problem with utilitarian theory as regards justice when we consider whether it is more important to work towards reducing pain and suffering or to increase pleasure and happiness? This is a key issue for Utilitarianism. Clearly the focus is to promote happiness by avoiding pain, but sometimes it may be necessary to focus on the pains and sufferings in order for this to be achieved.

Firstly, there is the priority to decide upon. Is it more important to end someone's pain or to satisfy someone's pleasure? In addition, in some moral dilemmas there are no alternatives but those that bring pain and suffering. For example, the lesser of evils situations have no 'happiness' or 'pleasures', say for instance, in the case of war or a just war. In addition, there are also the usual problems associated with ethical systems that only measure morality according to the consequence of an action, such as 'who makes the decision?' and based upon 'what perspective?' since one person's idea of pleasure and pain, and therefore justice and injustice, may differ from another.

A key argument that sets out this challenge is if one is already content, why increase contentment at the expense of suffering? This is morally wrong. For example, just because many people are well fed does not mean we should continue to leave the beggar to starve. This is certainly unjust. Nonetheless, it is here that Mill's harm principle can be applied effectively and it is this that is the key safeguard against just focusing solely on happiness. Mill's principle identified the fact that sometimes injustice needed rectifying and that this was also the task of utilitarian theory to bring about justice in the long term.

In conclusion, it appears to be the case that even though Utilitarianism focuses on pleasure that produces and maximises happiness, it is with Mill's work that we see an awareness of social injustice and a 'duty' for the utilitarian thinker to address this. If it were left up to the utilitarian theory of Bentham alone, however, the answer may be different.

5. The extent to which Utilitarianism promotes justice.

Promotes justice

Does not promote justice

Conclusion

To what extent is Utilitarianism compatible with the traditional teaching of Christianity?

In order to see how compatible Utilitarianism is with the traditional ethical teachings of Christianity it is important to firstly outline the main aspects of the theory. In summary, Utilitarianism is:

- ✓ Based on utility or usefulness
- ✓ Centred on 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number'
- ✓ Happiness and pain can be measured by the hedonic calculus
- ✓ The consequences of the action are the most important thing.

Now we can compare the principles of Utilitarianism with the ethical teaching of Christianity.

Summary

- ✓ Utilitarianism is close to the Golden Rule teaching of Jesus to do others what you would want them to do to you
- ✓ happiness is an important biblical ethic
- ✓ Utilitarianism has been the basis for much social reform
- X However, the pursuit of happiness above all else is incompatible with Christian teaching on love and duty
- X Some Christians believe in the absolute nature of biblical ethical teaching
- X Some Christians believe that motives behind actions are more important than consequences

Utilitarianism is only partially compatible because of its emphasis on the highest good. However, Christians believe in the absolute commandments of God and would not support the great emphasis on consequences within Utilitarianism.

Some more explanations *Extract from Joe Jenkins Ethics and Religion 1999*

1. Mill believed that his Utilitarian ethic had caught the very spirit of the **Golden Rule** (to treat others as you could want them to treat us). However, Christian love knows no limit and is prepared to go not one mile but two. To love one's neighbour as if he or she were oneself, to put oneself in his or her place, is certainly not to treat him or her as one of many. Utilitarians define 'justice' as treating 'similar cases similarly' whereas Christian ethics means 'treating similar cases dissimilarly', regarding the good of any individual as more than their own.
2. Christian ethics differs from utilitarianism in the importance each gives to the problem '**Whose good**'? While Utilitarians answer this question with 'What is the good?', Christian ethics answers it with 'Whose?'. For Utilitarians love is subordinate to justice, whereas for Christians love is primary.
3. A fundamental difference between Utilitarianism and Christian ethics can be seen in the events around the **trial of Jesus** before **Caiaphas**, as recorded in John's Gospel (Chapter 18). Jesus and Caiaphas act from totally different ethical principles, even though they might have spoken the same words: 'It is expedient that one man should die for the people' (John 18:14). But Caiaphas applied this principle to the other person, whereas Jesus applied it to himself. Caiaphas was concerned to maintain an existing social order, whereas Jesus was concerned to bring reconciliation and community where before there had been none.
4. While Utilitarianism aims to preserve and create an ordered and just social order, this is not always sufficient for bringing in an isolated and hostile individual into the community. Christians believe that only **love** can penetrate the barriers that often exist between people. It is relationship that is ultimately important, and only by loving another for their own sake can true community come into being.

The extent to which Utilitarianism provides a practical basis for making moral decisions for religious believers

Much of the AO2 so far has dealt with society (i.e. secular notion that incorporates non-believers) so it makes sense to focus on religious believers in this evaluation although bear in mind the Specification does identify the term 'non-believers' for which other appropriate evaluations, much of which you have read so far, can be used.

Some Christians could argue that Jesus' death on the cross and his subsequent resurrection is a clear example of the principle of utility. This is because Christians believe that Jesus died to give others happiness through eternal life. The act of self-sacrifice enabled the greatest number to achieve the greatest happiness. This is the foundational belief of Christianity.

In the same way as a utilitarian would claim that the ultimate goal is happiness, Christians would agree in that 'to love thy neighbour' is a basic principle and will bring universal happiness to all if practised. Mill himself believed that his utilitarian ethic had caught the very spirit of the Christian Golden Rule (to treat others as we would want them to treat us) which is also prevalent in other religions. Many claim that religion is based upon making people happy, such as eradicating suffering in Buddhism or serving the poor in Sikhism and Islam.

In addition, Utilitarianism and religious believers may agree on certain issues, for example, if one partner in a married couple commits adultery, then for the other partner's sake and for their children it may be better (less painful) for all concerned if they divorce. Religious believers also keep rules such as 'do not steal' and Strong Rule Utilitarianism would also keep this rule because it would fulfil the principle of utility.

Nonetheless, for some religious believers God's rules and teachings ensure justice, not a secular theory developed by man. They are divinely revealed, consistent and universal and not subject to change; in essence, it is not up to individuals to decide what happiness should be.

It is an integral feature of many teachings in religions, and certainly in Christianity, that through experiencing pain and suffering, which utilitarians avoid, people gain spiritually and become better human beings. People can then identify with the pain and suffering of others and focus on this instead of their own happiness. Following on from this, religions see spiritual goals as far superior to Mill's lower and higher pleasures.

Many religious people believe in moral absolutes such as 'do not kill' and other rules given by God, whereas Act Utilitarianism does not and looks at the consequences of each act to determine whether the act is good or bad. In addition, religious believers would state that rules such as 'do not steal' should only be followed as they are given by God and not because they promote the principle of utility.

Utilitarianism is against the idea of divinely ordained moral codes and the idea of 'means to an end', when it involves people, can challenge beliefs about the sanctity of human life. In the same way, the 'means to an end' principle can be seen to be lacking in compassion; for example, what about the religious teachings that concern support of the weak?

The most striking difference between Utilitarianism can be seen in Jesus' parable of the lost sheep, which delivers a contrasting message, the total opposite of utilitarian thought, namely, that the individual counts just as much as the community.

Overall, there are obvious areas where Utilitarianism shares beliefs and applications that are similar to religious teachings and practices but there are also clear areas where they are very different.

Complete the table below – use and the information on the previous pages

6. The extent to which Utilitarianism provides a practical basis for making moral decisions for both religious believers and non-believers.

It provides a practical basis for religious believers	It does not provide a practical basis for religious believers
Jesus' death can be seen as an example of the principle of utility	Caiaphas is utilitarian – Jesus is more loving
Both value happiness	God is the ultimate source of moral obligation – not happiness
Mill – Golden Rule	Christianity would not accept the suffering of the minority
Strong Rule Utilitarians – absolutist and deontological	Christians absolutists as they believe they are following divine laws
Act Utilitarians might agree with Christians on some moral issues e.g. divorce Similarities with Situation Ethics	Some Christians believe some things are intrinsically wrong – regardless of the consequences