

Compare and contrast utilitarianism with christian ethics

[Experience](#), [Happiness](#)



Compare and Contrast Utilitarianism with Christian Ethics The ethical teachings and values of utilitarianism and Christian ethics are similar in some aspects, yet however are diverse in others. Utilitarianism is a generally teleological ethical system, where the outcome is said to justify the act. The act is considered 'good' if it brings about the greatest good for the greatest number. Christian Ethics, however, can be quite different. Many aspects of its ethics are deontological, for example, the Decalogue and Natural Law.

There are other differences and indeed some similarities which will be considered throughout this essay. Christian ethics has many aspects which do not agree with the fundamental doctrine of Utilitarianism. Firstly, the 10 Commandments in the Old Testament are deontological, as it is law based and the action is considered good or bad intrinsically. Jeremy Bentham, the founder of Utilitarianism, states that an action cannot be right or wrong in itself, and it can only be evaluated when the consequences are taken into account.

The Bible implies that none of these laws should be broken, yet Bentham thought that any rules can be rejected should the person determine that the means can justify the ends. Bentham held that no one should take actions as right or wrong as a given, but should use empirical evidence to work out their effect and subsequently conclude on its appropriateness. Bentham's empirical method of finding out whether the action is worthwhile was to use the Hedonic Calculus, a process of assessment which gauges the act's outcome in several categories, such as its certainty, purity or extent.

Natural Law is another example of the diversity between Utilitarian and Christian ethical attitudes. Although it teaches that humans should use reason to realise morality (which is similar to Bentham's attitude), it fundamentally states that there are God given laws of the universe which eternally and constantly exist in nature. It is a Christian principle to live one's life in such a way they strive to be like Jesus, and are motivated to follow Christian principles and rules in order to do this.

This however fundamentally goes against Utilitarianism, which states that humans are merely motivated by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. This is how an action is considered good or bad in the Hedonic Calculus, if it brings pleasure for the most people or works to avoid pain. Furthermore, Christian ethics implies that one will find happiness by modelling themselves on Jesus and adhering to the teachings of the Bible. However, in Utilitarianism it is stated that one will find the most happiness when individuals are free to pursue their own ends.

The process of using the Hedonic Calculus aspect of Utilitarianism can also be likened to the Christian ethical principle of using one's Conscience. For this point, it is important to note that this is not in reference to the specific detail in the Hedonic Calculus, but is about the underlying reason for its use. In the New Testament, Paul advocated that the Conscience should be used when one needs moral guidance, which is linked to the will of God. Even though in Utilitarianism the 'God' aspect is not included in terms of justifying an action, the principle of mentally judging a deed is similar.

John Stuart Mill developed his own approach to Utilitarianism called 'Rule Utilitarianism'. There are some similarities with Christian ethics which lie in his doctrine. Firstly, Mill says that there should be general rules which people should follow in order to bring about the greatest communal good. This has two similarities with Christian ethics; first of all is the principle of law-making and secondly, the concept of the 'greatest communal good' can be traced back to the teachings of Paul in the New Testament, where he says that 'a good should not be good for the individual, but for everyone'.

Mill's proposed laws would be those based on general Utilitarian principles. Mill likened this principle to the Golden Rule of Jesus, which is the teaching that Christians consider to be of the highest importance. The rule states to 'do unto others as you would have them do to you'. Although this is essentially deontological, it is based on the principle of generating the most agape. Mill, like Jesus, held that general laws should be in place to help lead a good life. Situation ethics has also been pointed out as having similar principles to Utilitarianism. Firstly, both theories are examples of relativism, meaning that there are no absolute standards which apply to the rightness and wrongness of actions. Secondly Joseph Fletcher, the founder, argued that the Christian ethic of love can be labelled as 'justice distributed'. 'Justice' is in reference to determining what the most loving thing is to do for everyone. This can be likened to Utilitarianism, which replaces the word 'justice' with 'goodness', meaning goodness distributed (greatest good for greatest number).