

Greatest happiness principle

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



In his book *Utilitarianism*, philosopher John Stuart Mills expands and defends the notion of using the theory of utility to decipher between right and wrong, good or bad, in an attempt 'to rescue it from utter degradation' from those who have misapplied the theory. This brief essay will summarize Mills' view of utilitarianism by outlining its main themes and issues.

Mills is primarily concerned with determining how feelings of pleasure, beauty and happiness play into our ethical standards. His theory is founded upon the belief that a rational human being will make choices and act with the goal of achieving and fulfilling the greatest utility. For Mills, the words pleasure and utility are interchangeable, a point he makes in reference to criticism received by previous theories of utility that limited the range of utility's possibilities.

In contrast to his predecessors, Mills advances the Greatest-Happiness Principle in chapter two. This principle holds that any action can be judged 'right' or 'good' as long as they promote happiness. In fact, the principle states that the degree of 'rightness' or 'goodness' of an act stands in direct proportion to the amount of happiness the act promotes.

This has far ranging consequences because it is not limited to the happiness achieved by an individual in each context, but more importantly it takes into account the greatest human happiness that results from any particular action.

Utilitarianism, then, creates a model by which human beings can gauge their actions with the metric of utility for all. His proof of utilitarianism therefore shows how happiness can be morally desired as a end in and of itself. It

promotes people to act in accordance with the greatest common good. People not only benefit themselves by acting in this noble way, but they benefit all of humanity in the process.