

# [Explain the main principles of the classical forms of utilitarianism essay sample...](https://assignbuster.com/explain-the-main-principles-of-the-classical-forms-of-utilitarianism-essay-sample/)

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Utilitarianism was first created by Jeremy Bentham, he believed that human beings were motivated by pleasure and pain so he can be called a hedonist. Bentham said that all human beings pursued pleasure and wanted to avoid pain. As a hedonist, he believed that pleasure was the sole good and pain was the sole evil. He said ‘ an action is right if it produces the greatest good for the greatest number’ this is where the greatest good is the greatest pleasure or happiness and the least pain or sadness, and the greatest number are the majority of people. His theory is democratic, because the pleasure can’t be for one person alone. When faced with a moral dilemma, he argued that we should choose the act which brings the maximum possible happiness for the most people. Bentham also believed in the Principle of Utility, this is by which an action is judged good or bad according to the results that it achieves. Utility is meant that the property of any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, the good or the happiness.

However, we should prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered. He also created a way to measure pain and pleasure, this is by using the Hedonic Calculus. This weighs up pain and pleasure which is generated by the available moral actions to find the best option. It considers seven factors which are its intensity, its duration, its certainty or uncertainty, its propinquity or remoteness, its fecundity, its purity and to what extent it’s going to affect other people. The balance of pleasures and pains is compared with those of other options and the one that has the greatest amount of good, is the correct decision. The action that leads to the best consequence is the morally correct one to pursue. This sounds the perfect way to make the best moral decision, however it is very time consuming and hard to apply to complex situations. For each action, Bentham believed it to be good or bad according to its predicted results in generate the maximum amount of happiness, shared between the maximum numbers of people.

His assessment was therefore quantitative, and it was made on the basis of actions. In addition, Bentham’s Utilitarianism is known as Act Utilitarianism. This is because it judged every situation individually and in isolation from the community. In every case he asked what action would bring about the greatest good. This means that every action is judged on its own merits and individual circumstances are taken into consideration. Which means that it is flexible, however time consuming. It wasn’t just Bentham who came up with ideas about Utilitarianism, there was also John Stuart Mill. Mill’s father was a friend of Bentham and Mill decided to adapt on his theory. Mill maintained that the well-being of the individual was of greatest importance and that happiness is most effectively gained when individuals are free to pursue their own ends, subject to rules that protect the common good of all. Whilst Mill accepted the utility principle of the greatest good for the greatest number, he was concerned.

If the greatest good for the greatest number was purely quantitative, based on the qualities of pleasure and pain caused, what would stop one person’s pleasure from being completely cut off if the majority gained pleasure from that act. To address this Mill focused on the qualitative pleasures instead of quantitative like Bentham. He developed a system of higher and lower pleasures, preferring the higher pleasures to the lower ones, he went on to say “ it is better to be a human dissatisfied than a pig satisfied”. Mill believed that pleasures of the mind were higher than those of the body. Higher Pleasures are things such as Art, Drama and Poetry; the Lower Pleasures were things such as Sex, Food and Drink. He believed that the lower pleasures were animal like pleasures and he said that we were moving away from this. Nevertheless, there’s a link between the two, as to be able to enjoy poetry or art, we need to eat and drink in order to survive. However, Mill clearly believed that to pursue bodily pleasures e. g.

Food, drink, drugs and sex – wasn’t faced with a choice between pleasures of the body or a pleasure of the mind, that of the mind is to be preferred. Mill also went beyond Bentham in proposing a positive place for rules within an overall Utilitarian approach. He uses the example of a person who tells a lie in order to get some immediate advantage. He argues that society needs the principle of truthfulness, without which nobody would ever be able to trust anybody to be telling the truth. Therefore, the rule that one should tell the truth is a general means of securing the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Breaking that rule, although it might appear to offer greater happiness in the immediate situation, will in the long run lead to less happiness. Moreover, Mill’s Utilitarianism is known as Rule Utilitarianism. This is because he would try to define it in a way that made it practical to use when creating rules in society. He concentrated on how decisions are reached so the greatest good is given to the greatest number in society. Individual pleasure is often sacrificed to the community. Mill believed for a society to operate it needed general rules which needed to be accepted. Mill also believed that Utilitarianism should be Universal. He said that everybody around the world would be able to live by the theory.