

# Comparing both immanuel kant and john stuart mill's philosophical positions

[Philosophy](#)



Comparison of Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill Introduction Each day human beings are confronted with decisions that drive their actions, their consequences and the benefits that they will gain. Two historical philosophers, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill, proposed two contravening ethical theories that guide decision and action in society.

### Comparison

Immanuel Kant, a famous historical philosopher in the 18th and 19th century, proposed the ‘Categorical Imperative or Practical Imperative’ (Maj, 2002). In his ethical theory that takes on a deontological approach, Kant placed an emphasis on the “Good Will” of actions as opposed to the consequences. He believed that happiness is derived from the good will in performing an action regardless of the consequences. Consequently, the results of an action, whether good or bad, should be deemed irrelevant so long as the basis of good action was based on good will. Furthermore, he believed that people actions were morally good when based on an obligation to duty. According to Kant, if a maxim was in compliance to universal law then it was morally good and could be subjected to rational human beings (Maj, 2002). Kant further specified the practical imperative which dictated on human dignity. The basic logic of human dignity is based on treating human beings always as an end in themselves as opposed to a means to an end. However, one major assumption of Kant’s theory is ignorance of the consequences of actions based on good will. Actions based on good will are viewed as morally right irrespective of the consequences whether good or bad.

John Stuart Mill proposed a different code of ethics, drawn from teleological

theory, known as utilitarianism or the principle of utility (Maj, 2002). His theory justified actions as morally good if it led to happiness. However, if the result of the action was unhappiness, then it should be deemed as immoral. Moreover, decisions and actions are judged on morality based on the consequences and not the performing of the act itself. Furthermore, he theorized that if an action results to greater happiness to a greater number of people then it was morally right. Thus in pursuit of happiness through hedonism (ethical and psychological hedonism), people should perform actions that result to pleasure and prevent pain. John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism also justifies sacrifice if it contributes to the pleasure of people or minimizes pain. For example, sacrifice in form of discretion, that result in happiness to the greatest number of people. Moreover, Mill's theory supports altruism as opposed to egoism. The basis of altruism is the promotion of other people's happiness at the expense of individual selfish interests. An in depth analysis of the two philosophical points of view, generates a contradictory stance as opposed to similarities. Foremost, Kant's philosophy is based on deontological ethics derived from moral obligation to duty. Thus, actions done out of duty are morally good. One major assumption of Kant's theory is the failure to take into account the outcome of good will. Consequently although will is within control the result of the will is beyond control or judgment. In a practical situation in which a student cheats on exams to pass, the action is deemed as morally wrong since the driving will is not good, but bad. However, Mill's philosophy is based on consequentialism or teleological ethics. Thus morality of an action is judged on the premise that it produces maximum pleasure at the expense of pain.

Mill's theory gives a free reign of action and decision of an individual so long as it increases happiness or minimizes pain. Consequently, it justifies actions such as cheating in an exam. As long the person derives pleasure and is not affected by the pains of guilt or gets caught, then, the action is morally good! Consequently, if the student ends up passing the exam, then his action was morally good. The major assumption is that the person intent is good in their pursuit of happiness from his/her actions.

#### Reference

Maj, J. (2002, April 1). Moral Law Based on Immanuel Kants Kantian Ethics and John Stuart Mills Arguments for Utilitarianism. Retrieved from snonline.net: [http://www. snlonline. net/pdfs/a4-janemaj. pdf](http://www.snlonline.net/pdfs/a4-janemaj.pdf)